

OFFICERS' CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

OCF HANDBOOK

**A VISION FOR MILITARY MINISTRY
AND HOW WE SERVE WITHIN
THE MILITARY COMMUNITY**



Building Christian military leaders, families, fellowships...*for a lifetime*

The “OCF Handbook: A Vision for Military Ministry and How We Serve Within the Military Community” is a publication of Officers’ Christian Fellowship of the United States of America.
© 2022. All rights reserved.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®). ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

About the photos: The collage of photos on the inside front and inside back covers represents a variety of events, activities, and ministry on any given day in OCF. The photos are the property of OCF and were submitted either by OCF staff or members with permission.

ABOUT THE OCF HANDBOOK

A Vision for Military Ministry and How We Serve Within the Military Community

This Handbook casts vision for military ministry, explains OCF, discusses the military Christian life, encourages personal spiritual growth, and gives ideas for executing member-led ministry. It is written primarily for OCF members, but it will be useful for others who work within the military ministry space.

Most readers should go straight to the section in which they are interested, and mentors can use the various chapters to work progressively through discipleship topics. We have organized the content starting with the big OCF picture, then moving to how our members live out their Christian lives within the military context. The next section is about equipping and engaging one another in Biblical fellowship at the local level—from Bible studies and personal mentoring to supporting the chaplaincy and ending with a focus on nurturing the family. There are sections on how to see military service as a calling, staying under authority, and thinking about spiritual threats. The Handbook ends with chapters on the ministry's organization, governing documents, and a few helpful single-source references and checklists (for those who love a checklist).

There will be future editions of the Handbook, so please let us know when you find areas that need to be updated. You can contact the OCF Home Office for assistance in finding the most current version.

A digital version of this handbook will be kept on the OCF website at **ocfusa.org/handbook**.

CONTACT US

By mail: Officers' Christian Fellowship, 3784 S Inca St
Englewood, CO 80110-3405

By phone or email: (303) 761-1984; (800) 424-1984; contact@ocfusa.org

HANDBOOK TOPICS

OCF And the Military Society

1: OCF Purpose, Vision, Mission	2
2: The Distinctives of OCF.....	5
3: The Ministry Pillars of OCF	7
4: The Military Steward	10

Christian Military Life

5: Spiritual Habits for Daily Life.....	14
6: Integrating Faith & Profession.....	19
7: Evangelism	27
8: Centering on Scripture	30
9: Engaging in Prayer	34
10: Pray-Discover-Obey (PDO)	36
11: Financial Life.....	39

Local Biblical Fellowship

12: Small Group Bible Study	44
13: Starting & Sustaining Fellowship.....	47
14: Hosting & Facilitating Bible Study.....	51
15: Transitions & Handoffs	55
16: Christian Mentoring	58
17: The Military Chaplaincy	63
18: Chapel Programs	66

19: Nurturing the Family	70
20: Singles, Couples, Children.....	73

Faith and Participation

21: OCF Membership.....	80
22: Local Church Membership	83
23: Member Roles Within OCF.....	87
24: OCF Volunteers Who Participate.....	92
25: OCF Conference Centers	95
26: Special Events, Conferences, Retreats.....	99
27: For a Lifetime.....	101

Critical Thinking

28: Worldview.....	106
29: Professional Calling	110
30: Authority, Submission, Ethics, Morality	114
31: Assignments, Promotions, Retention	118
32: Learning from Military Life	122
33: Threats & Opposition.....	126

Essential Parts of the Body

34: The OCF Directory.....	132
35: Council & Staff.....	135
36: Like-Minded, Military-Focused Ministries.....	137
37: OCF’s Home Office	138

Ministry Documents and History

A: OCF Foundational Statements & Thoughts (Summarized)	144
---	-----

B: Constitution & Bylaws	147
C: A Brief History of OCF	153
D: Glossary.....	156

Checklists & Quick Start Guides

A: Pray-Discover-Obey (PDO)	162
B: OCF When You PCS or Go TDY/TAD	164
C: Starting an OCF Fellowship	166
D: Hosting & Leading a Bible Study	168
E: Chaplaincy Support.....	170
F: Christian Mentoring	171

OCF AND THE MILITARY SOCIETY

1: OCF Purpose, Vision, Mission

IN THIS CHAPTER

OCF exists to gather Christian military leaders together for Biblical encouragement and growth so the entire military society is impacted positively wherever these leaders serve. Currently serving Christian leaders will be encouraged and helped in their spiritual journey by being connected with the larger body of Christ, especially with those who have served ahead of them.

OCF'S PURPOSE

OCF's Constitutional Purpose is to glorify God by uniting Christian officers for Biblical fellowship and outreach, equipping and encouraging them to minister effectively in the military society. This purpose is rooted in our ministry's original 1943 Certificate of Incorporation and is the launching point for this handbook. We exist to glorify God. Our hope is that men and women will remember God's ultimate authority over all of life as they serve within professional military roles, responsibilities, and affiliations. Whether these uniformed years are few or last over 20 years, no person can stay in uniform indefinitely. OCF challenges those who have worn the uniform to consider serving the military community for a lifetime (in ways consistent with the changing stages of life). While in uniform, we minister within the military culture, volunteering, connecting, and serving the local body of Christ wherever we are assigned. After leaving the military, we transition to new roles and jobs, but we still have the opportunity and privilege to serve those who enter the military after us!

OCF's 1943 Certificate of Incorporation says we are to "bind together officers serving, or who have served, in the Armed Forces." Notice the phrase "or who have served"—OCF members continue to use their abilities and gifts to serve the military community after leaving the uniform (many times this is done within their local churches). Ministry success is not dependent on where we have ministry staff, nor on how well a conference center is doing, but rather OCF ministry success is wherever two or more come together in Christ's name within the context of the military community and service. We glorify God by

getting Christians together within their local communities so that the study of the Scriptures and the prayer of the body cause men and women to minister effectively in the military society.

OCF challenges military officers to be increasingly integrated in every aspect of their lives—home, professional, recreational, and church. We are individual leaders laboring for God’s glory within the country in which He placed us, confident that a sovereign God calls us to serve in different ways and with different gifts. The Christian officer has a responsibility to do all things as unto Christ, but with the added privilege of holding a commission from the President to lead for the good of subordinates, peers, and the nation.

OCF’S VISION AND MISSION

Our organizational Vision amplifies the OCF Purpose by articulating a simple long-term result coming from our parachurch ministry: **We want the military community to be positively impacted through Christ-like leaders.** OCF members are found within a military culture that has unique language, customs, courtesies, clothing, housing, and assignments. It is an exclusive culture that requires an identification card for participation and access. This military community is made up of officer, enlisted, dependent, civilian, contractor, and retired personnel—all made in the image of God, valued, and with an eternal soul. Christian leaders are found within every rank and grade, so we are confident that if OCF’s members are leading and serving with a Christ-like stewardship, then there will be parts of the military community where men, women, and children thrive in the freedom to fully use their skills and abilities to leave things better than they found it (positively impacted).

Military officers have been given a stewardship from God to be servants in leadership roles. We’ll repeat that: a servant who is a leader. We have a unique opportunity to work and live among others where the good news of Jesus Christ can be shared, explained, and lived out. Our positive impact is evident in the way we lead, the policies we draft, the influence we exert, and the way we enforce rules and regulations. The indirect impact we have flows from a Biblical view requiring us to be an example and to care for every person as an image-bearer of God. We are stewards of what God has entrusted to us, and every believer is to be salt and light regarding the gospel that God made known through Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:13-16; Ephesians 3:4-12). Jesus gives His servants talents “each according to his ability. Then He went away.” We know He will

return to settle accounts with us, and our goal is to hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” for how we did our work (Matthew 25:14-30).

Since the military community (spoken of in our Vision) is distinct from the rest of the U.S. population, OCF’s Mission is to engage military leaders in Biblical fellowship and growth to equip them for Christ-like service at the intersection of faith, family, and profession. OCF fellowship (Bible study and prayer specifically) should result in personal Christian growth, Christ-like service, and greater obedience and submission to God’s authority and Christ’s commands. Military rank and influence are meant for effective service where many roads cross: the training of forces, their equipping, and their employment on behalf of the nation. In a similar way, God places Christian leaders at crossroads where their Christian faith informs how they fulfill roles of being single, married, parents, friends, peers, commanders, and more. Godly leadership should have a corresponding improvement of the unit or neighborhood climate where this kind of leader lives and serves (Daniel 6:4). When Christ Jesus taught about a servant’s responsibility, He said, “Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more” (Luke 12:48). We are a wealthy group within a wealthy nation, and we’ve been trained for such a day as this, so you can say that much is required of us.

OCF helps develop personal spiritual growth and resilience by connecting men and women in fellowship and mentoring relationships (discipleship) that center on Scripture, engage in prayer, and allow members to live life together. Military Christians understand one another’s customs and courtesies. A regular gathering of Christian singles, couples, and families will have the effect of OCF members caring for their neighbors in housing, in exchanges, in commissaries, in their units, in garrison, in the field, at sea, and in times of peace and conflict. Men and women in OCF fellowships plant seeds and provide water for the spiritual growth God gives (1 Corinthians 3:6-9). The result will be leaders and volunteers who are changed and matured in military service, and the places where they work will be blessed by their presence, their leadership, and their fulfillment of duties.

Christ-like leaders love as they have been loved, forgive as they have been forgiven, share in suffering for the sake of others, and spend themselves for the sake of souls found within the military community.

2: The Distinctives of OCF

IN THIS CHAPTER

We are a ministry to the military community by those who are serving, or who have served, within the military community so that Biblical fellowship will happen around the world in a way that positively impacts the entire military community. This chapter helps you answer, “What makes OCF unique in the military ministry space?” The following three distinctives can help you encourage others to become co-laborers in the OCF body as you articulate our place alongside other ministries.

MEMBER-LED

OCF members and leaders are “insiders” of the military community. They come from within the ranks, live on and around military installations, and can go wherever the military goes. We are a ministry of volunteers. This allows the effects of OCF to reach into military units and communities, because the primary work of ministry is being conducted by those in military-only areas on or under the sea, in the air, and on the ground. They understand what their colleagues and friends are going through, because they experience personal and professional life with one another. In our way of speaking, we would say they walk the deck plates, share the tents, and are on the radio net with us. *(See the chapter on “OCF Membership” for further implications.)*

DUAL CALLING

The OCF body helps members integrate the dual calling of being a Christian leader and a military leader during their time in uniform. We equip Christian military leaders to live integrated lives within their professional calling in a way that positively impacts the military community (Romans 12:1-2). This faithful stewardship of the talents given by God glorifies Him as OCF members lead well and seek the good of those serving with them. *(See the “Integrating Faith and Profession” chapter for a deeper discussion.)*

LIFETIME FELLOWSHIP

Our original incorporating document stated that the Officers' Christian Union was formed to "bind together officers serving, or who have served," and whose allegiance is to Jesus Christ. Connecting in fellowship was such a hallmark of the ministry that it became part of our name when we changed from "Officers' Christian Union" to Officers' Christian Fellowship. It reflects our deep identity of connection.

Biblical fellowship is critical for equipping and encouraging our members. Above all, those in OCF groups are members of a larger Christian family of brothers, sisters, parents, and children with Christ at the head (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 2:19). This family relationship extends beyond the local fellowship to the larger church body. OCF is unique among military ministries because we provide the opportunity for formal membership. Members accept both a call to action and a commitment to serve—to go on mission with OCF is to minister for the good of the entire military community.

We say "OCF for a lifetime" because our laborers are found in every phase of life—among officer candidates, those in uniform, family members, and among those who have retired or separated from the military. We encourage members who have served earlier in life to continue to use their experience and talents to impact the lives of men and women currently serving in the military. This focus on lifetime membership creates a steady, long-term touchpoint of Biblical fellowship for those who serve in this challenging profession. (*See the chapter on "For a Lifetime" for more thoughts.*)

3: The Ministry Pillars of OCF

IN THIS CHAPTER

These Pillars express the essential traits of our Fellowship. They speak to what OCF is known for doing, are a summary of OCF priorities, and help give focus to ministry work. You can memorize these pillars using the acronym “CUE LINES.”

Centering on Scripture. We affirm the Bible as the very Word of God, God’s revelation of Himself. OCF members and participants study the Bible so that all might know what to believe, obey, and embrace as true.

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Uniting for Fellowship. We gather in Biblical fellowship wherever men and women come together through their common faith in God’s only Son, Jesus Christ. This union of believers results in good works benefiting the entire military community.

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Engaging in Prayer. We join in personal and corporate prayer, dependent on the Holy Spirit and obedient to God’s command to pray.

“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now” (Philippians 1:3-5).

Lay-Led. We are a body of Christian officers serving, or who have served, within the U.S. Armed Forces. OCF’s membership also includes non-officers, civilian and military, who are committed to OCF’s work. Our ministry is accomplished through volunteers supported by a limited number of full-time staff.

“Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by Him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor” (1 Peter 2:13-17).

Integrating Faith and Profession. We believe Christian integrity requires professional excellence coupled with Christ-like attitudes, words, and actions in all areas of life.

“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him ... Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:17, 23-24).

Nurturing the Family. We are Biblically called to serve as one family, a Christian family made up of singles, couples, and children—all who have been adopted by our Father in heaven. We encourage, build up, and help develop family relationships that glorify God.

“Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity” (1 Timothy 5:1-2).

“However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 5:33-6:4).

Equipping to Serve. We equip members to spend, and to be spent, for the good of the entire military society.

“So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us” (1 Thessalonians 2:8).

Supporting the Chaplaincy. We encourage OCF members to know their chaplain(s), serve as volunteers, be the hands and feet of spiritual resilience within the military community, and champion the roles of the chaplaincy.

“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you” (Hebrews 13:17).

“We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

4: The Military Steward

IN THIS CHAPTER

A Christ-like steward-leader is one who thinks, plans, and acts in obedience to our Lord's directions. The leader will give an account to God for decisions made using His resources and talents. These talents are to be used for the good of others both while in uniform and after uniformed service.

PROFESSIONAL STEWARDSHIP

The steward of a household was charged with overseeing resources that fed, clothed, and employed household members. The resources belonged to the master, so stewards made business decisions in the owner's best interest. Matthew records several of Jesus' parables dealing with the care of God's resources, anticipating His return, and a readiness to give an account of how talents were used (Matthew 24:36-25:46).

Similarly, Christian officers are responsible before both God and our nation to care well for the people, materials, finances, and authority with which they are entrusted. You are a steward of lives and of resources. Each member of the military community is precious to our God and to their family and community. From our perspective, there is no better person to entrust our nation's men, women, and resources with than Christian leaders who know that everything belongs to God. These leaders will one day give an answer to Him for how they did their work. The entire military should benefit from leaders who know their God and are humbled in that knowledge. As Paul Pettijohn, former OCF Executive Director, used to say, "You are men and women in the military serving on mission for the Master."

Stewardship continues after you leave the military. OCF has remained on mission and relevant since 1943 because leaders who have already traveled the road of uniformed service subsequently turn around and mentor, encourage, and help future generations. We are constantly welcoming new members every month even as other OCF members leave uniformed service. Because we minister within a dynamic community we cannot grow weary of saying and teaching and reminding ourselves of the same things over and over, confident that God still calls men and women to glorify Him in military service. Philippians 3:20 says, "our citizenship

is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,” but while on earth we seek the good of the people among which God has placed us (Jeremiah 29:7; Acts 17:22-31).

LOCAL CHURCH STEWARDSHIP

Since the military promotion and retention system is designed to constantly pare down the number of people who stay in uniform, be ready to transition out of service when God makes it clear that it is time to go. After transitioning, remember that you will always understand the military in ways no one else does. You can help your local church find ways to serve their military members. For example, help them stay connected with members who are preparing to go into the military as well as with those who are currently serving. If there are no military members within your church, OCF can connect you with Christians who are stationed elsewhere so that they can be mentored virtually.

Hopefully you have had time to think about why you served or are serving the nation, the role of authority and the proper use of governmental power, and even about your willingness to lay down your life for others (John 16:32-33; 1 Corinthians 15:17-26). You can start with Christ’s words, “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 16:25). Take your meditations on these truths along with your experience in uniform and help encourage the next generation of laity who will go to the military mission field. Experience and age are so valuable!

CHRISTIAN MILITARY LIFE

5: Spiritual Habits for Daily Life

IN THIS CHAPTER

Developing lifelong habits for spiritual growth, knowledge of God, obedience to His commands, and faithful ambassadorship requires daily discipline so the worries of each day do not neutralize believers.

YEARS OF CHANGE

Our years of military service leave most of us greatly changed. The challenges, trials, training, communication skills, leadership, separation from civilian culture, imposed discipline, ethical challenges, physical fitness standards, pressure under fire, and much more provide a culture within which men and women are matured in physical skill, mental agility, self-control, and spiritual insight. Don't waste these years through ambition, careerism, vain distractions, self-pity, etc.; rather, live as those who are growing in knowledge of God. Pray for wisdom to live personal lives of discipline in which you faithfully represent the God who redeemed you, adopted you, is changing you, and who placed you in the military for His glory. Grow in knowing His will and obeying it (Matthew 7:21). We who believe in Jesus Christ are indwelt by the Holy Spirit so that we can mature into a lifetime of obedience (John 16:7-15).

This concept of obedience does not set a law or standard for OCF'ers to achieve. It is meant to spur you on to know God, to grow in love for Him, to be built up toward effective service in the kingdom, and to help refine your thinking toward things that will keep you in the spiritual race. Every single one of us knows what it is to be weary, overwhelmed, or to wrestle with indwelling sin. May one or more of these godly habits move you toward a more faithful walk with the Lord who has called and drawn you to Himself.

BEAR GOD'S NAME WORTHILY

If we claim to be a Christian, we need to know God. Growing in knowledge of God allows us to represent Christ better within the military community. God says through Moses, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain" (Exodus 20:7). This command

is about how we live and make God known. To state this command positively: Believers in the Lord God Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, are commanded to bear the name of God worthily in all we do. It is good to structure our habits to spend time with Him. We fix our eyes, with unveiled faces, on the God who invites us to behold (stare at) His glory so we are transformed (2 Corinthians 3:18; Romans 12:1-2; Hebrews 12:1-3; Colossians 3:1-2).

To know someone necessitates having spent time with them. To be Christ's ambassador of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20) implies we progressively get to know Him better. We cannot know Him if we do not spend intentional time in prayer and in studying what He has given us in the Bible. This means more than quality time, but quantity of time (we get to know dear friends through quantity of time, not just short bursts of "quality time"). We work up to larger amounts of Bible study time by starting with manageable portions. Like becoming committed to a good workout, there comes a point where the believer cannot imagine failing to stay connected to the daily nourishment of Christ's vine. We bear good fruit because we abide in Christ (John 15:1-11). You are on a life-long pursuit of daily habits that may seem small at first, but these accumulate into a life of Bible study, of prayer, and of service within your culture.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Make room for daily time with God (prayer and Bible reading) so that the relentless pace of military life will not cause you to miss time with your Creator. Real military life means that there will always be competition for your use of time. Time is used for more physical fitness, another task, another test, another meeting, night classes, or subordinates who require your attention. Determine that you will grow a little every day, "for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil" (Hebrews 5:13-14).

As an example of a daily discipline, think about basic military training. Trainees are required to wake up at a specific time (usually with much external motivation), jump into a particular uniform, and then start the day with a physical fitness routine. Christian leaders can continue a similar routine of waking to spiritual fitness. As another example, if your commander requires a 0600 check-in, you will probably be ready to report in before 0600 hours. We ought to be much more willing

to start our day reporting in to our heavenly Commander and Lord! Begin your day in prayer, worshiping His holy name, petitioning Him according to the examples we find in Scripture (e.g., Matthew 6:9-13), and asking God for the wisdom to proceed through the day. We have the privilege of “reporting in” to our heavenly Lord (who created all earthly commanders) and receiving His Commander’s intent and orders for the day, meditating on “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable ... anything worthy of praise” (Philippians 4:8). It is amazing how prayer and the Scriptures instruct our hearts as the Holy Spirit opens our understanding and helps us apply the Bible (Hebrews 4:12).

Bible study and prayer are not laws leading to righteousness. Resisting the pressure of worries and work will help us focus on what is important. Paul said it this way to the church at Corinth: “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). The writer of Hebrews says, “For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. ... But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls” (Hebrews 10:36-39). It helps to remember we are running a race of endurance!

PURSUING PERSONAL WORSHIP

Just as intimacy of relationship is developed by time with another person, so prayer can be a way to know both ourselves and our Lord better. Pray that God will guide you through the morning “routine.” Christ exemplified this as He walked through His ministry (Matthew 26:36-46, Mark 14:32-42, Luke 22:39-46, John 17:1-26). Shorter periods of time are occasionally necessary, but try to make short devotions the exception rather than your regular practice. Personal morning worship is a great starting point for anyone whose job involves crisis management from the moment the duty day begins. God sent manna to Israel in the wilderness as physical bread, so we can ask God to “give us this day our daily bread” as spiritual food (Matthew 6:11). Weekly rhythms lead to a weekly Sabbath rest in which you plan to join with the visible church in worship. On your Sabbath day, cease from the normal tyranny and pace of life and be renewed spiritually in God’s call to enter

His Sabbath rest ... 52 days of renewal every year (Hebrews 4:9)! There are times during deployments, underway operations, or other duty cycles when you will have to be working on Sunday, so you can set aside a different day or moment of sabbath rest. In those situations, be flexible and establish a rhythm that you can keep.

What might a daily study look like? You could select a book of the Bible for focused study, or you could use a devotional or Bible reading plan to get going. There is no single answer as to how to progress through a study of Scripture. However, experience will prove that once we discipline ourselves in the habit, we eventually move from a “have to do” attitude into a “I don’t have enough time” to dig deep into the Scriptures. We have web-based resources on our website (**ocfusa.org/studymaterials**), and OCF publishes a booklet called “100 Days Bible Study” (developed between 1921-24) by Lieutenant General Sir Arthur Smith when he was Captain Arthur Smith, Coldstream Guards, Adjutant of the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. It is a daily Bible study written for military personnel. Despite many combat tours in WWII and Korea, plus the demanding life of a senior officer, LTG William K. Harrison (OCF president for 18 years) disciplined himself to read through the entire Bible every year. He inspired many officers after him to do the same.

SETTING YOUR ALARM

A daily Bible study and prayer habit begins with planning ahead. You may find it helpful to set out your Bible, pen/pencil, and notebook before bedtime, and then clear your desk so that conditions are set for spending time with God first thing. Even prepping the hot water or coffee pot can help you use the first moments of your waking time well. Shift work and night hours may mean that you spend time in the Scriptures later in the afternoon or evening, but personal disciplines and intentional preparations help.

You can do a little math to figure out when to set your morning alarm and wake up for action. Calculate alarm time by thinking through what must be done before duty time (show time). Things like devotions, shower/prep, commute, and personal PT are examples of what may have to fit between the alarm going off and showing up for military duty. Starting with your first mandatory event, work backwards in time: (Duty Time) - (Commute Time) - (whatever else) - (time for personal worship) = Wake Time.

Everyone develops habits over their lifetimes, so think about your personality and do what will work for you.

STAYING FOCUSED

Next, consider your learning style to find ways to retain some of what you are reading, seeing, hearing, and thinking. Digital documentation is handy for many, but digital notes may eventually not be retrievable. Consider writing your thoughts and observations in a journal or notebook that can be reviewed many years from now. Nearly all of us are surprised to see how we have grown spiritually when we look back over the course of our lives. In fact, we are surprised to read notes of things we once “knew,” things written by our own hand, but forgotten over time. If you are easily distracted, use your mobile device, journal, or notebook to jot down thoughts that pop into your mind during devotions. Jotting them down will help you stay on task in the moment while saving the “random” thoughts for when you have time to deal with them. Stop morning worship when you hit your time limit for devotions so that you do not have to rush to meet other obligations.

Finally, share what you learned, observed, or have questions about, with another person. Talking with someone else about the things we have learned often helps us learn them better and retain them longer. Sending a message or video to a friend will do the same thing. Hopefully, you can process your study of Scriptures with a Christian mentor, but if you don't have one yet, ask God to steer your steps to connect with one!

6: Integrating Faith & Profession

IN THIS CHAPTER

Christ-followers are made visible in the way they integrate their faith into every part of their personal and professional lives, expressing confidence that God is working all things according to His plan. We reject attempts to make much of ourselves or of our professional successes, lest we imply failure to those who do not experience temporal success. Our public and private reputations flow from an integrity that can be strengthened by personal reflection expressed in a mission statement, by the public help of your church and peers, by a mentor regularly meeting with you, and especially by living a humble life with those who are closest to you.

INTEGRITY

Integrity speaks to the wholeness of our lives (think of an integer in math: it cannot have a fractional component). Integrity in our personal lives is based on a standard of right and wrong (i.e., there is a right way to ensure the integrity of a ship, making it watertight). Just as it is impossible for you to stop being a military member when you take off your uniform for the day, so it is impossible to stop being a Christian in every area of life. As Christians, God gives us His Spirit that we might both understand and be empowered to obey the Word of God. Every day we make decisions that either conform to His standard or deviate from it. God commends Job’s integrity in life by describing him as, “a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil ...” (Job 2:3). Every person’s conscience provides an initial sense of right and wrong, and that conscience is helped by both the laws and cultural norms of our communities. For the Christian, however, the final standard for life is God’s Word. We live before the face of Him who is holy. We call good what God calls good, and we abhor what God shows us is sin.

The Father sent the Holy Spirit to empower us to grow in righteousness, teaching us to please Him. Trying to control our thoughts, actions, and words in our own strength will reveal the depth of our sin—it is an impossible task to control sin because we need Christ’s finished work

applied to us by faith. Our heart is revealed by what we say and do (Luke 6:45; James 1:26). Pursuing integrity requires a Spirit-dependent life, informed by the Scriptures, and matured by disciplined habits. Spirit-empowered Christian leaders will think good thoughts and speak useful words most effectively if they have a steady diet of meditating on God's Word, hearing Biblical teaching, engaging in daily prayer, and guarding their eyes and ears from evil. Wise decisions made during a crisis, and good words that come out during stress, flow out of a spring that has fresh water (James 3:11-12).

We need fellow Christians and the local church to exhort us in right living and to point out when we are not living with integrity (Proverbs 27:17). When others find us compelling and worthy of their trust, then our bent knees will keep us relying on God alone who is able to make us trustworthy. Give public thanks to God for how He is using you in the military. Don't justify bad habits, harsh language, and disobedience to the laws of the land, or to the Uniformed Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), because justifying these things will harden us from seeing wrong patterns of behavior (Hebrews 3:13-14).

Invite a fellow laborer in Christ's body to give you clarity and accountability. Say "Thank you" when someone points out a fault. Those two words are powerful, because they give another person permission to keep speaking into our lives. Accepting critique from others can keep us from being blind to our faults. While a mentoring relationship helps sharpen our skill set, we also need someone who is even closer than a mentor, someone who works and lives with us daily. This close friend needs permission to speak clearly, honestly, and often. Humble yourself in this friendship as God makes a less fractured and more whole you.

AS UNTO THE LORD

Personal integrity, flowing from our faith in Christ, will result in professional lives of trust and competence that are evident to those we work alongside. Integrity doesn't mean we will be the top performer, will get great assignments, be promoted when expected, or achieve earthly success, but it does shine Christ's light to a watching world (we call this professional excellence)! Work done "as to the Lord" implies we are diligent in our military duties—we know whom we are to please (Colossians 3:17, 23). If there is a tension between obeying the commands of God or the command of an earthly leader, the choice must be to obey God. In making obedient decisions, the Christian is challenged to wrestle with Scripture and is helped by Christian elders

and mentors who can help distill the issues and the obedience required. Paul instructs that we (servants) “are to be submissive to [our] own masters in everything; [we] are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything [we] may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior” (Titus 2:9-10).

The prophet Daniel is a particularly good example of one who carried out his professional duties well while serving a secular government that was opposed to God. He faithfully served God from his youth onward, and when he was an elderly man in the court of Darius the Mede, the other satraps (governors) “sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. Then these men said, “We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God” (Daniel 6:4-5). God sent Daniel into captivity, and then Daniel served God faithfully for the good of the Jews, Babylonians, Medes, and Persians.

Our good work will either flow out of a desire to please Christ in all we do, or from a self-focused motivation such as fear of people, pride, or a need to be recognized. When motivated to work as unto Christ, we rejoice not only in personal successes, but we also rejoice when others have success or receive recognition. In “failure” we are secure in our identity as loved and adopted children through Christ. If we forget this identity and strive for self-gain or recognition, then the success of others can leave us with envy or bitterness. Christian integrity examines our motives and helps guard us against discouragement and feelings of uselessness when we plateau at work or when we hit tough obstacles.

CONSIDER A PERSONAL MISSION STATEMENT

We want you to live a life in which your faith informs (is integrated into) your profession, family and community, and your ministry role within all of them. If this is a new concept for you, please pray about what it might look like to integrate your faith into every part of life. Seek the Holy Spirit’s guidance and consider using a tool like a personal mission statement to help you initiate integrated living. Writing a mission statement will help you distill your purpose and focus and then help you remember that conviction when you revisit the mission statement later. If appropriate, write a mission (purpose) statement for your marriage and your family as well.

To begin this exercise, stop and think about why you are in the military and what spiritual, mental, and physical gifts you have. What are the main things (the big rocks, if you will) that you prioritize above everything else (the small rocks and sand)? In writing the mission statement, identify specifically who you are serving, the goal of your life and work, and the means to this goal. Once we can articulate what God might do with our lives in the military community, we will then waste less time and resources while simultaneously finding greater joy in every assignment. Amid the many great opportunities to serve, play, volunteer, and travel in the military, a mission statement can give clarity for what we say yes to, and it provides thoughtfulness for the times when we have to say no. It is one way to lead a life where our faith informs our profession, our family, our role in community, but most importantly, in the transformation of our personal lives. It helps us to live “integrated lives.”

Having a mission statement can help protect you from a sense of purposelessness. This can creep in when there are no priorities and when most of your decisions flow from self-focused motives or in reaction to crisis moments. Your conscience should speak loudly if you are being selfish with your time and resources. Draw near to God through Word and prayer, review your mission statement for alignment of purpose, and then be 100% available for the activity you are convinced requires your time right now.

The good fruit of an integrated life may look like: 1) a home that is open to others, 2) free space on a calendar that allows for interruption, 3) the prioritization of weekly worship and fellowship, 4) space for an intentional Sabbath rest, 5) a willingness to lead the local OCF body even when tired, stressed, and with limited free time, 6) giving a listening ear to a hurting friend, 7) a family that is working together as one team, and 8) children who understand that family time, finances, and food can be gladly spent on others.

Keep an eye out for godly role models who live integrated lives and who appear excellent in their private, church, and professional lives. Look for those who demonstrate perseverance in pursuit of glorifying God. This type of person motivates us toward professional endurance and effective military ministry and may even be a great person to ask to be your mentor. May God make you the type of person that others will desire to imitate (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9; Hebrews 13:7).

PROFESSIONAL LIFE REPUTATION

Public leadership springs from personal integrity. Leaders with integrity will be found doing what is right in the sight of God, even if it is invisible to others. This kind of private integrity begins with a heart attitude that submits to God and to the earthly authority He has put over us (Romans 13:1-7). We are all initially judged by outsiders based on visible things like our personal appearance in uniform, haircut, and fitness. If these things are squared away, there is often an assumption that you can be trusted in other areas. You must know the regulations and obey them, since ignorance is not an excuse, especially after the initial two or three years in uniform. Grace is given to Ensigns and Lieutenants, but everyone expects a more senior officer to conform themselves to military customs and courtesies and to excel beyond the minimum standard. Christian leaders must grow up and demonstrate maturity, not only spiritually, but also professionally.

If you know your commander's priorities, then you can make those priorities your own. Faithfully carrying out assigned duties will honor your commander, glorify God, and bless subordinates who are watching for consistent character. Do not lie; live a transparent life, taking responsibility for your own work and the work of your team. Behave in a manner consistent with your Sunday worship by obeying even the simplest things like traffic laws. Be patient with drivers around you. See if good words flow out of your mouth when in a stressful situation. The Holy Spirit convicts, reminds, and teaches us regarding these examples and many other areas every day. The apostle Paul exhorts Christians to live quietly, to focus on our own issues, to do our work well, to live consistent lives before non-Christians, and to provide for our own food, clothing, and necessities (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12).

Officers bear a responsibility to support and defend the Constitution of the United States, so it makes sense to study the Constitution. The First Amendment says, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech" Stay abreast of how this amendment is being interpreted and applied by the judiciary. Be gracious in speech, careful in policymaking, and avoid giving the perception of viewpoint discrimination. As representatives of the federal government, officers help establish an environment that allows the free exercise established by the First Amendment. All may publicly worship and be secure in this free exercise. Jesus' statement that, "No one comes to the Father except through me," remains true even as you ensure the religious

accommodation of those with a different religious view. Be genuine in what you do and say, not lying about anything you know to be true. When you have questions about the First Amendment, seek out a trustworthy chaplain or other counselor for advice. Be an advocate of First Amendment freedoms as one who is helping perpetuate a healthy nation.

ONE DAY IN SEVEN

If the mission requires you to work on a Sunday when you would normally have the day set apart as your day of rest unto God, then do your work without complaint. The Bible shows that God expects us to save lives, to stay under authority, to live for the good of others, and to help those in need even if it is a Sabbath day (Matthew 12:8, 12; Luke 13:16; 14:13). On the other hand, do not be lazy when preparing for that seventh day of rest. Be diligent by working hard for six days. Get studying, errands, and yard work done so that you can worship and enter God's rest on the seventh day (Hebrews 4:9-11). This Sabbath command is anchored in creation, repeated throughout the Old and New Testaments, and is found in the Ten Commandments alongside murder, adultery, and stealing.

DISCRETIONARY TIME

Since the military leader's life is typically driven by a schedule outside of their personal control—whether it be work-ups, field training exercises, annual training, or weekly mission requirements—you will need to regularly step back and look at where you are spending discretionary time. We make time for things we prioritize. So, if you hear yourself tell someone that you do not have time for daily devotions, weekly fellowship, or the spontaneous encouragement of brothers and sisters in their workspaces, then ask yourself whether those things are a priority. You probably have more time for spiritual disciplines than you think. Whether it is fitness, gaming, shopping, scrolling the internet, or watching movies, we make time for certain activities. Now think about this: God is a jealous God, and if He waits for us to desire His worship above distractions on this earth, then would you be willing to be as honest with yourself as possible (Matthew 6:19-24)? What will you prioritize today?

Perfectionism is a threat to most military officers who strive to be excellent at work. It takes self-control to stop a project when “good” accomplishes the mission since there is always one more way to make it better. If this is you, try to analyze where you take a pause in the

workday (chat break, coffee break, exercise break, etc.), and see if you can use that time to seek spiritual fellowship, Biblical nourishment, or time in prayer. Spiritually integrated lives come from faith muscles being developed over time by intentional pursuit and constant practice.

PRIVATE LIFE REPUTATION

Everyone develops a reputation. In the military community, officers usually live in something like a fishbowl or glass house. Their lives are regularly observed, analyzed, and critiqued, both on and off base. Military leadership encompasses a 24/7 responsibility—there are times to step away from the immediate job, but not from the responsibility of being the accountable leader. Similarly, the Christian is always an “ambassador of Christ,” carrying around the responsibility to speak only what He speaks, to represent Him in daily life, and to share Him with a watching world (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). The car you drive, the house you live in, and the hobbies you pursue will all speak a message to the watching world. So “aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands ... so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one” (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12).

Junior officers who follow Christ are frequently asked why they do not use inappropriate language, laugh at immoral jokes, get drunk, or participate in immoral behavior. These questions do not come up as often later in one’s career. The reason is that our reputation and integrity become known, the pressure to conform diminishes, and we become trusted who are not prone to behavioral modifications under pressure. Developing this reputation requires us to be ready to answer questions about motivation, meaning, and identity, and even about who will judge actions on this earth (family, commanders, the UCMJ) and at the end of the ages (God). Practice using everyday language to express spiritual truths when giving an answer for the hope that you have in the finished work of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 3:15). Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians exhorts us to live confident that Christ is returning and that we have an eternal welcome into His presence. Live as if you will depart this earth today, while simultaneously making decisions in case you to live to be 100 years old (1 Thessalonians 5).

OPPOSITION IS NOT A SURPRISE

Christ said that He came to elicit such obedience among His disciples that even members of a person’s own family would hate them (Matthew 10:21-22; Luke 21:16-17). This sounds odd at first, but we should not

be surprised when we face opposition for holding to the Christian faith. Our enemy is not the person confronting us, our enemy is the father of lies, Satan (John 8:44; Ephesians 6:12). Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to comfort us, remind us of what He taught, and to give us the power to obey all that He commands. We are to be “kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting [our] opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will” (2 Timothy 2:24-26).

When opposed, take a deep breath, pray for wisdom, and ask the person opposing you a question such as “Why do you ask/say that?”, or “Why is this important to you?”, or “What do you mean by the phrase ___?” Asking questions gives you time to discover the origin of the issue, helps reveal motivation, avoids jumping to wrong conclusions, and thinks the best of the other person. Confrontation, even when it feels negative, is often used by God to teach us. Hebrews speaks of our being trained and disciplined by a loving Father so we may share in His holiness (Hebrews 12:3-17). His loving discipline humbles us and opens our eyes to things we have not seen. It also reveals pride and self-righteousness in our hearts, and we learn to love as we have been loved.

Choosing to serve in the U.S. military is a calling and an adventure. A life of faith within the military poses some unique challenges for uniformed and family members alike. You have daunting responsibilities, professional challenges that can seem overwhelming, frequent moves and deployments that stress relationships, and your Christian faith may not be welcome in many places. For more information and resources on living an integrated life, please visit the OCF Integrated Faith Project (ocfusa.org/ifproject).

7: Evangelism

IN THIS CHAPTER

Followers of Christ must be ready to give an answer for what they believe, why they live a certain way, and for how they face difficulties with hope.

This chapter focuses on evangelism within the context of the military society. You are free to express your beliefs while in uniform, but workplace conversations should give no perception of requiring subordinate agreement or implying government endorsement (establishment).

Religious expression by military members is protected by the First Amendment under most circumstances.

HANDLING GOOD NEWS

Evangelism refers to sharing the good news (gospel) of God’s work through His Son Jesus Christ. As Paul said, “that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel” (Ephesians 6:19). It is not an attempt to force someone to agree with you, or to impose your understanding of truth; nor is evangelism coercion. It is simply attempting to explain what the Bible teaches about who God is, what He has done through His Son Jesus Christ, and what is yet to come. The Son of God has always existed, He who took on flesh, lived a sinless life, and was crucified, buried, and resurrected as foretold by the prophets. He is the substitutionary payment for sin, giving His righteousness to believers so we have peace with God. Living out the gospel requires wisdom, “always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience ...” (1 Peter 3:15-16).

Military leaders must discern between ordinary interpersonal conversations versus unprofessional attempts to persuade toward a particular viewpoint. You have the same First Amendment rights as every other citizen of the United States, but you must be particularly careful if you are senior to the listener so that you avoid a perception of coercion or endorsement of a particular religious view. Christians faithfully proclaim the truth about who Christ claimed to be, what He did, and how He proved His claims. However, sharing this truth must

be handled appropriately whether a military member is in uniform, is exercising military authority, or is out of uniform and exercising no authority over the person in the conversation.

You have freedom to answer questions posed to you. Be ready to explain why you behave in certain ways, speak in certain fashions, and hold Biblical beliefs when you are asked. You make Christ known in your words and actions, so be ready to share spiritual truths at appropriate times while remembering it is OK to remain silent at other times (1 Thessalonians 2:8). You will constantly grow in discerning when to speak, when to act, and when to be silent as you share your life with others.

A LIVING WITNESS

If you are going to talk a Christian talk, then you must also walk the walk. Let your life be a witness of Christ. Be a leader of integrity who is known for competent, uncomplaining, diligent, trustworthy work. Guard your language and consider how and where and with whom you spend your free time. Go above and beyond the call of duty—and not just at work. Allow Christ to shine in your family by being a humble spouse and parent. If single, fill your social time with good friends, healthy recreation, fellowship, Bible study, and things that build up. Coworkers, peers, and subordinates are watching you, so your life provides a profound witness to those who do not yet know eternal hope through Jesus Christ.

Invest and serve in a local church or chapel. If we are going to serve as Christ's ambassadors to our segment of the military, it is good to have the support of a local body of believers. Your participation in a local church or chapel service gives you the opportunity to invite others to join you for church activities or worship services.

When asked about what you believe, why you make certain decisions, or how you prioritize, you are free to give truthful answers about why you are the way you are. You can express the confidence you have in who God is. This makes your faith in Christ visible. If a coworker or acquaintance shares a concern that lends itself to prayer, it is OK to ask them if you might be able to pray for them. It may be best to pray right away so you don't forget. As your rank changes, and as you exercise more authority, you will need to stay abreast of the rules and regulations governing the contexts in which it is appropriate to share your faith. We are to be both bold and wise in proclaiming life through Christ, not casting that which

is precious in the wrong place, and not trying to manipulate anyone toward faith (Matthew 7:6).

Being a witness for Christ may be positively received by coworkers and neighbors, since not everyone is hostile to religious expression. While these folks might respect your perspective and faith, others will oppose the ethics and personal choices you make. Some will attack you because you do not gladly embrace their ethics, morals, or choices. The irony of our post-truth environment is that nearly every expressed religious belief will be accepted by those around you except for those beliefs aligned with a monotheistic belief such as Christianity. Our response to opposition and hostility is patience and gentleness, confident that it is God who gives “repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.” (2 Timothy 2:24-26).

8: Centering on Scripture

IN THIS CHAPTER

Enduring ministry flows from work that is anchored in the Scriptures. The Bible is a trustworthy, reliable text inspired by God that is useful for all of life. As such, it is the authoritative source for knowing God, His work and promises, and His commandments, and for aligning our lives in obedience to His revelation. Consider buying a well-bound and reliable translation that you expect to use for the rest of your life.

A KEY PILLAR

Which OCF Pillar would you describe as pivotal for our ministry to accomplish its mission and work? Most point to either “Centering on Scripture,” or “Engaging in Prayer.” There can be no enduring and significant work of OCF without both a study of the Scriptures (for an understanding of God, repentance, belief in Jesus, comfort in sorrows, and confidence in eternal life) and a body of Christians who pray together. The Bible and prayer nourish us day by day as we grow into what we cannot be apart from the grace-filled work of the Holy Spirit to apply all of Jesus’ work to us as adopted children. Jesus transforms us as we study the Scriptures because they bear witness about Him and all that God prepared beforehand (Ephesians 3:4-12).

INERRANT AND INFALLIBLE

The Bible, without error in its original manuscripts, is God’s authoritative Word for all of faith and life. OCF’s Statement of Faith (Appendix A) declares what we believe “according to the Scriptures.” That explains that our faith in Jesus Christ is anchored in the Scriptures, so we must consider whether the Bible is reliable, true, and inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16). The text of the Bible claims to be God’s Word to us, revealing the mysteries He wants us to know. It is a compiled book written by many authors over hundreds of years in three different languages and handed down generation by generation, giving us a reliable historical text that has been preserved with amazing accuracy. The internal consistency of the Bible supports the supernatural authorship it claims for itself. It is not a book full of errors as if it were

passed down through the centuries by one person telling another person telling another person and so on. Rather, manuscript scholars compare thousands of copies of whole and partial ancient manuscripts. These comparisons yield better than a 99% confidence that they have faithfully reconstructed the words of the original manuscripts. The reconstructed text has then been translated into English for our reading and study. In addition to being able to compare actual manuscripts and fragments, there are extensive quotations of New Testament Scripture in other documents (extrabiblical—not the Bible) dating from the first century onward. These extrabiblical quotations help validate the majority of the New Testament. We conclude, then, that the Bible is historically authoritative, accurate, and trustworthy, regardless of a person’s belief or unbelief in the Bible’s claim to be the Word of God.

Christian fellowship hinges on the person of Jesus Christ, the only Son of God. Without Him there is no “Christian” disciple. If God did not take on flesh, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, if He is not sitting now at the right hand of God, then there exists no reason for faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and we can consider ourselves free to seek hope in some other religion. The Christian, then, necessarily has confidence that the Bible is God’s Word, was written by human authors inspired by the Holy Spirit, and remains fully trustworthy. It is trustworthy regarding its historical reliability and in its message about how to draw near to God in order to live the Christian life. The church has always studied the Scriptures to know God, to hear from God, to learn what we ought to believe as true, and for hope regarding God’s unfolding plans. In fact, Peter writes that even though he and the apostles heard the voice of God when they were on the mountain, the written Word of God is surer than even that supernatural event (2 Peter 1:19-21). God does not change. The God who revealed Himself to Adam and Moses is the same God who appeared to the apostles. The Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy (1978) provides a helpful articulation of this confidence in the Bible.

THE WHOLE OF SCRIPTURE

When studying the Bible, it is necessary for Scripture to interpret Scripture, meaning that one part of Scripture is made clearer by seeing the passage in both an immediate context as well as within the entirety of the Bible. Bible apps and computer software are helpful for word and phrase searches. There are also Bible commentaries to assist in your study. Print and digital resources give insight into both the Bible and the historical creeds and doctrines of the Christian faith. Be discerning when confronted with something that seems new or innovative. Questions we

hear today are nearly the same, or are a variation of, questions answered in previous generations. Remind yourself that others have walked the Christian spiritual journey ahead of you, so pursue answers from pastors and teachers, from older men and women, and from books that have stood the test of time. Remember that Satan is a deceiver, and his lies are simply recycled into modern subtleties and pursuits.

Since the Bible reveals God's eternal plan for mankind, search it for what the New Testament calls the mystery of Christ, now made clear to heavenly rulers and authorities through God's work in the church (Ephesians 3:10). God the Son came to earth in the form of man, lived a sinless life, bore the sin of His flock, defeated death in His burial and resurrection, and renders Satan powerless over God's people. Jesus said to the Jews, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life" (John 5:39). Without the Son of God taking on flesh and satisfying the wrath of God, we would still be enslaved to sin, separated from God, and deserving spiritual death for all eternity. Our eyes have been opened by the Holy Spirit so that we are no longer in darkness. Thanks be to God! It is good to weigh our priorities and decisions, as well as our habits and behaviors with the clarity found in the Bible. We earnestly study the Scriptures to test the doctrines we are taught.

Before opening your Bible for daily study, ask God to give you eyes to see, ears to hear, and a mind to understand what He wants you to grasp. The Scriptures are spiritually understood because the Holy Spirit dwells within Christian believers. Without the Spirit's wisdom, we would not understand spiritual truths (1 Corinthians 2:14). Study the following passages to help you consider the internal evidence for the Bible's claim to be Scripture that is believed and obeyed by the church:

Luke 24:25-32 – What authority did Jesus ascribe to the Old Testament Scriptures?

John 1:1 – Who is the Word that John refers to?

1 Timothy 5:18 – What does Paul imply when he quotes Luke's gospel as "Scripture"?

2 Timothy 3:16 – Notice who Paul claims is the author of all Scripture.

2 Peter 3:15-16 – What does Peter imply when he says Paul's letters are recognized as "Scripture"?

The Bible is useful for all of life (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 John 2:5-6) and

for our growth in the faith (John 17:17; 1 Timothy 4:6), and we should not be intimidated by the large number of translations available for use and study. Using the many English language versions of the Bible (ESV, NKJV, NASB, etc.), we can compare the various translations as we wrestle with perplexing passages. A comparison of translations helps show variations in how the Greek or Hebrew text can be rendered, giving insight into difficult passages. In addition to comparing translations, do not be afraid to consult a reliable Bible commentary or theology text during your Bible study. And remember, your local fellowship is a great starting place to bring up things you are grappling with.

A QUALITY BIBLE AND MEDITATION

Purchase a high-quality Bible that will last for decades, hopefully for your lifetime. Even though it is more expensive up front, it is worth the cost! The paper quality and space on the page should allow you to make notes in the margins, mark it with colored pencils or highlighter (it is OK to write in your Bible), and survive a spill or two of coffee or tea. While digital versions of the Bible are useful for quick searches, comparing translations, and finding theological notes, they may not be available in austere environments, when cell service or the power is out, when a publisher removes the digits, or when you are sitting in a prison. Think about what you desire to have in a non-permissive environment, either because you are deployed or because the Christian faith is prohibited (officially or practically). Since your personal growth and spiritual survival are at stake, spend the time to stay nourished in daily Biblical intake. Through the Word, we are born again (1 Peter 1:23), convicted of sin (Hebrews 4:12), and made wise (Psalm 19:7ff; 119:105). Memorize it, meditate on its meaning and application, and share with others what you are learning.

Meditating on Scripture has been the habit of Christians throughout the ages to hide God's Word in our heart (Deuteronomy 6:6; Psalm 119:11). Memorizing the Word has the benefit of causing us to meditate on the specific words and phrases used in each verse as we turn the verse(s) over and over in our mind. You will find verses pop into your consciousness during group study, sermons, conversations, and whenever the Holy Spirit causes them to be useful for the various moments of life. Memorize to grow in personal faith, for passing on Christian hope to the next generation, for building up of the body of Christ, and for moments when you don't have the text of Scripture in front of you, whether you are free or in prison.

9: Engaging in Prayer

IN THIS CHAPTER

Prayer is personal and corporate, it is spontaneous and intentional, and it changes us as we lay concerns, griefs, praises, thanks, and supplications before our God who is over all.

SPONTANEOUS AND HABITUAL

Prayer is a regular part of a believer's daily life. What a privilege that the God of the universe invites us to come before Him in worship, confession, and supplication. Prayer can be more than brief, spontaneous, or present-moment focused prayer, but it is also habitual and intentional worship of God. You can use the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4) as an outline to walk through daily prayer, or maybe use an acronym such as ACTS (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication) to guide a time of prayer. The methodology does not matter as much as learning to develop prayer as a time of worship, adoration, thanksgiving, confession, repentance, and petition. Like good radio transmissions, prayer requires us to unkey (release) the mic switch, allowing times of silence for us to be in receive mode.

JESUS' EXAMPLE

During His days on earth, Jesus taught His disciples to abide in Him (John 15:1-11). He is the vine, we are the branches, and in that relationship we meet and spend time with Him. Jesus did His Father's will while on earth, and Luke makes it clear that Jesus made prayer a habitual part of His life (Luke 5:16, 6:12, 9:28, 11:1, 22:44). May we also be found in regular and persistent prayer. It takes time to build a prayer habit, so ask God to develop in you a spiritual discipline of prayer—don't be discouraged if there are ups and downs in that growth.

LOVE FOR OTHERS

One way to grow in love for others is by spending time praying for them. Pray for those in authority over us (1 Timothy 2:1-2), for enemies and persecutors (Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:28), for Christian laborers in the field (2 Corinthians 1:11; Colossians 4:3), for the suffering and sick (James

5:13-16), and for those brothers and sisters we know are struggling with sin (1 John 5:16). Often we are the ones most changed through time in prayer. We end up with softened hearts that are grateful for God's love and grace. We desire to see God work in the lives of those who visibly oppose Him. Paul declares that it is God Himself who grants repentance leading opponents to escape the devil's snare (2 Timothy 2:25-26). Prayer trains us in love of God and love of neighbor.

Prayer leads us to submit our will to God's directing hand (Proverbs 16:9). The planning process for starting a fellowship or looking to future changes begins with prayer. OCF calls this Pray-Discover-Obey (the next chapter). Without prayer, we risk asking God to bless our plans rather than asking God to direct our steps. Psalm 127:1-2 says, "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for He gives to His beloved sleep." Start the day in prayer, then try to stay in an attitude of persistent prayer as you serve God in your work, rest, and recreation.

10: Pray-Discover-Obey (PDO)

IN THIS CHAPTER

The PDO process emphasizes prayer first, planning second, and obedient action third. This model helps OCF members to be still before God, asking Him for wisdom and direction before future actions are planned out. (See the appendices for a quick-reference PDO checklist.)

WHY PRAY FIRST, PLAN SECOND

The concept of the Pray-Discover-Obey (PDO) process came into OCF when we were called Officers' Christian Union (at that time PDO was known as Pray & Plan). The military culture needs this idea of prayer first and planning second because we have a natural bent toward immediate action and the pursuit of results. We are a people who love to make plans, to use our own wisdom, and to ask God to bless our plans. Sin nature leads us to this self-confident view, a view that can distract us from examining the Scriptures for God's instruction and wisdom. We even resist acknowledging that God directs our steps (Proverbs 16:9). God alone gives us the ability to integrate our Christian faith within the military so that it informs every aspect of our personal lives. To battle this natural inclination, OCF asks our leaders to use the PDO process in the hope that our staff, volunteers, and OCF groups will regularly seek God's wisdom.

In James 4:13-17, James writes to dispersed Christians that it is evil to boast arrogantly about what we will do today, tomorrow, or next year. Instead, we "ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.'" How wonderful it would be if every OCF fellowship, leader, and family spent time in the Word and prayer asking God for wisdom regarding how to spend our days and how to use God's resources. James concludes with, "So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin" (v.17). Ask God for help discerning the right thing to do.

The PDO process has many variations, since it may be used by an individual, a couple, a family, or a larger group. For more PDO information, visit ocfusa.org/pdo. Here are some of the steps and thoughts you might use:

BEFORE THE PDO

1. Prepare by studying and meditating on Scripture as you begin in the “pray” phase before you meet with future participants and supporters.
2. Invite others to pray with you about the PDO.
3. Consider fasting to prepare spiritually.
4. Draft topics and categories you will cover in PDO.
5. Set PDO date and time, then invite participants.

DURING THE PDO

1. Begin in verbal worship (this is a continuation of the “pray” phase started previously). You can use song, prayer, and reading Scripture. Thank God for putting you at your current assignment and ask Him to direct the steps of the local body.
2. Start the “DISCOVER” phase by moving through the topics you drafted. You can have a short prayer before each topic, or you can stop and pray when you hit a tough decision or sticking point.
3. Set aside preconceived ideas and stay humble. Try to include everyone in the discovery phase. If something contentious arises, stay aligned with the Scriptures.
4. Take notes—write down key points and thoughts.
5. Develop an objective or goal for topics requiring action. Gain participant agreement on goals.
6. End in worship (song, prayer, Scripture).

AFTER THE PDO

1. “OBEY” means using God’s resources for the work He has given you or the group to do.
2. Ask for help staying on course. Consider who might help you take action (obey) and persevere in that action. It may be someone nearby or a friend from afar.
3. Repeat the PDO process as needed (at least annually). Plans need review and updating as the group and purpose for meeting develop and change over time.

POSSIBLE PDO GROUP TOPICS TO CONSIDER:

- When, where, what time to meet
- What to study and the format to use
- Will you include food, music/song, games, etc.
- Childcare and participation of children
- Order of events: Prayer, Study, Fellowship, Music, Food, etc.
- Name of your group for advertising purposes
- Chaplaincy coordination
- How to make the group visible (advertising)
- Who is group admin? (to coordinate, synchronize the group)
- Who will update the info in the OCF Directory (ocfusa.org)
- Leadership during TDY/TADs, deployments
- Transitions, handoffs during PCS season

POTENTIAL FAMILY/PERSONAL PDO CATEGORIES FOR PRAYER AND DISCUSSION:

- Spiritual growth, personal and family
- Hospitality, community engagement
- Church roles, service opportunities
- Education
- Vacation, travel plans
- Finances: budget, tithes, offerings, etc.
- Fitness and health
- Property, resource stewardship
- Assignment, job prioritization
- Stay in or transition out of the military

11: Financial Life

IN THIS CHAPTER

If you are in the military, then you are managing great wealth. Now consider what it means for God to be the owner of every financial asset that He has entrusted to your care. What follows is a brief discussion of using money to meet current obligations, to give generously, and to faithfully store up a portion for future expenses.

BIBLICAL FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

As a serving military OCF member, or as one who has served, you know the generosity of the U.S. government to compensate you for your service. With financial blessings comes the responsibility to be intentional about your financial stewardship. Make this stewardship a matter of regular prayer, since you are responsible first to the Lord (our Master) and then to your family, church, and community. Much has been written about finances, so this brief section is not intended to be exhaustive, but simply to address broad principles for us to remember.

Ownership. Everything comes from, and belongs to, God. Keep an open hand before Him who asked, “Who has first given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine” (Job 41:11). “For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. ‘If I were hungry, I would not tell you, the world and its fullness are mine’” (Psalm 50:10-12).

Priorities. Financial stewardship reflects what we prioritize. “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21). You care for your family and relatives by planning your income against anticipated expenditures and by making sure plans are in place and easily accessible in the event of your death (1 Timothy 5:8). God gives us resources and then teaches us not to hope in wealth, but on God Himself (1 Timothy 6:7).

Contentment. Do not covet (Exodus 20:17), and be content with what you have (Hebrews 13:5-6). Live as exiles and strangers on earth with

an eager eye toward eternity (Hebrews 11:13-14), since you are laying up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21). Contentment enables you to find joy in every situation.

Family. If you are married, financial integrity requires the skills and temperaments of both husband and wife. When handled well, differences in marriage bring individual strengths to the process, enabling you to keep a vision for the future while being disciplined in meeting current obligations for living expenses, including how much and where to give. Spend time building a financial vision together—dream together. Talk through your goals, hopes, and expectations so your finances become a source of marital strength. If you do not, they may turn into a point of division. Satan has used poor financial stewardship to break up many marriages.

Children are taught by observing how we handle family finances. They know whether we really live as if everything belongs to God (Psalm 50:10-11). They can sense contentment. If you are single, then you have a freedom that married couples do not have. Use this freedom to be wise in singleness, but you might also prepare to be ready for marriage if God opens that door. Both married and single Christians can strive to be financially ready for a different type of service after their unformed years are complete (e.g., church, missions, non-profit, or volunteer work).

Stewardship. In ancient days, the steward was responsible for running the household on behalf of the master. Similarly, if everything belongs to God (our master), then we are stewards of finances. We will be called to account for our actions, giving an account regarding things entrusted to us (Matthew 25:29). Here are a few practical areas to actualize the principles laid out above:

Giving. Giving comes before investing. Support your local church first, then consider helping missionaries, parachurch ministries (OCF included!), and others. What we give should be our first fruits and not our leftovers. This is much easier if you work from a budget. In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul exhorts men and women toward generosity in chapters eight and nine, especially 2 Corinthians 9:6-8.

Budget. The idea here is to spend less money than you earn. Establish a plan for how much you expect to earn and what you expect to spend (Luke 14:28-30). Budgeting ensures that you have a plan to spend within your means. That plan should include your normal obligations, as well

as money set aside for giving, for saving, for unexpected expenses, and money set aside for investing in your own retirement and legacy. Once you have a budget, put it into action and stick to it. Thinking through reasonable and likely expenses will help ensure your success in giving, saving, spending, and paying off debt. Finally, be sure to enjoy some of the fruits of your labor ... but stay within your budget (Ecclesiastes 5:18).

Emergency Fund. Murphy's Law says that no matter how carefully we plan, something will go wrong. That is why you need to have an emergency fund established for the unexpected expenses of life. Many advisors recommend you save three to six months of living expenses. This fund can save you from unnecessary fees or debt simply because you disciplined yourself to save for contingencies (Proverbs 27:12).

Debt. The Bible warns against bad debt, so avoid it and be wise how you use debt if it is needed (Proverbs 22:7, 26). You might enter the housing market by taking on a mortgage, but then avoid other kinds of debt by planning well and being disciplined in spending. Simple things like saving for known expenses and paying off a credit card each month will save a great deal of heartache in the long run. If you do find yourself in excessive debt, seek help and address the issues sooner rather than later. Strategies like the "debt avalanche/snowball" methods can help tackle difficult financial situations. Get help early.

Investing. The Parable of the Talents shows that we have a responsibility to put God's resources to work and not to let them sit idle (Matthew 25:14-30). Investing should come after we give and after we meet obligations. Investing can provide for our own future expenses and legacy (Genesis 41:34-36). We can take measured risks that match our temperament and needs. For example, longer-term goals like retirement can handle more risk than shorter term goals like paying for a new vehicle or a child's wedding. Additionally, diversifying your investments will reduce overall risk (Ecclesiastes 11:2).

Retirement Planning. We have a responsibility to consider how we will support ourselves and our families when we take off our uniform for the last time. Work is part of God's plan for His image bearers from before our fall into sin (Genesis 2:15). While we never stop working, we do plan for a time when we need less income. Most folks have access to powerful tools such as Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs), 401(k)s, and other investment vehicles. If we build wisely, we might enjoy financial freedom in the future. It is good and right to enjoy the fruits of our labors and use them to bless others (Ecclesiastes 5:18-19).

End of Life Planning. We strive to finish well in all things, including our earthly lives. We can love our families by preparing for the certainty of the close of our earthly chapter. Pre-deployment processing requires us to update our wills and beneficiaries, but there is still more to do. In the emotion of the passing of a loved one, easy tasks become difficult and fraught with complexity. We can make this work easier by ensuring all our documents are easy to find and up to date—that military and private insurance policies are current, that financial accounts have updated beneficiaries, and that we have done the hard work of planning for the guardianship of children. Additionally, we may need to set up Powers of Attorney as we, or even our parents, become older and lose some mental agility. Just as God had Moses lay hands on Joshua as he took over the leadership of Israel, so we plan for succession (Numbers 27:12-23).

Financial principles are part of military ministry, because your military service occurs during the critical years of laying a foundation for stewarding God’s resources. This foundation will enable ministry as you receive paychecks and funds, as you give faithfully and spend within your plan, and then as you anticipate passing on blessings to another generation.

LOCAL BIBLICAL FELLOWSHIP

12: Small Group Bible Study

IN THIS CHAPTER

Small Bible study groups develop resilient, maturing Christian believers who grow in their ability to integrate faith into every area of their lives. Lifelong friendships are developed, comfort and encouragement are found, and family bonds are built within small communities sharing the Word and life together.

FACE TO FACE OR VIRTUAL

Small group Bible studies have been the core of OCF since we incorporated in 1943. Bible study groups gather in dorm rooms, barrack spaces, tents, homes, base facilities, ships, and everywhere two or more open the Word of God together. Some Bible studies continue in virtual spaces among friends who have long since moved away from one another. These gatherings nourish and equip the saints as well as develop community relationships. You can help your local group by setting aside funds to buy food, drink, dishes, cups, and maybe even keep some extra Bibles around for sharing with others. God's Word is fully adequate to help encourage us and teach us to worship Him. His Word teaches, revives, and focuses the weary person so they can be refreshed and sent back into the field to where we minister to the entire military society.

GROWTH AND MATURITY

If military members, spouses, children, DoD civilians, contractors, and friends are to mature as Christians during their years in and around the military environment, someone needs to provide the leadership for them to gather for Centering on Scripture and Engaging in Prayer (OCF Pillars). The most important thing about a Bible study is that the Bible needs to be studied. Sounds obvious, but we are easily distracted by the environment, by social moments together, by hearing what others say about the Bible, or by simply trying to do activities that seem important at the time. Help guard the local OCF fellowship from mere philosophy and self-focused talk in order that all might hold "fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints

and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God” (Colossians 2:19). Study the Bible and pray together as you continue to do good works.

The gospel of Jesus Christ must be heard so that many might believe (Romans 10:14). Those who have believed are filled with knowledge leading to spiritual wisdom, bear good fruit in their lives, and are strengthened toward endurance in their spiritual walks (Colossians 1:9-12). Conviction regarding sin comes from studying the Word. The Holy Spirit applies Christ’s work to our lives. Because God desires the lives of believers to become more and more conformed to His will rather than to the culture we live within, it is essential we learn of God’s faithfulness throughout history. Hearing about God’s holiness, mercy, love, patience, and justice helps inform how we live and lead. The Scriptures declare who God is, what He has done, and how we are to live as His ambassadors. They contain all the encouragement and help we need to live faithfully.

COMFORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT

Bible study allows the Holy Spirit to comfort us and to apply the work of Christ to our lives and situations. We are humbled when we consider God’s greatness, and we are convicted regarding persistent sin. We need the salve of the Word when walking through suffering. Opening the Bible shows us Jesus, the word of God, “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

Military believers need regular encouragement to submit to governing authorities. We also need to do good, even if we think we might suffer for it (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-21). We walk with one another in various relationships according to our time of life—some as sons and daughters, some as mothers and fathers, and some as brothers and sisters. The body of OCF finds empathy with one another in small groups, because the examples and stories that come to mind will often be those that spring from our common military environment. Few people outside of the military understand our situations fully, so there is great comfort in others who listen to us as we share using a common military language. Who better to pray for and encourage you than someone who is on the same mission, experiencing similar op tempos and stresses?

Some people show up to a Bible study carrying a heavy load. They are tired and sometimes discouraged, and their faith may be struggling

amid pressure. Life is simply hard. Others arrive full of such enthusiasm that their spirit can be blessedly contagious. No matter how someone walks into Bible study, your priority is to work for their refreshment, encouragement, and preparation so that they can be sent back out to serve the entire military society. Small spiritual depots should exist around the world, fueling the saints for new spiritual work. If you are hosting a virtual Bible study, learn how to guide the time so that participants feel free to join the discussion, and have white space where they can inject a thought and depart the virtual gathering without feeling rushed.

The Holy Spirit applies the Word in exactly the right way to our daily lives, helps us to walk with integrity, gives us reminders of the words Christ has given us, and uses brothers and sisters to hold us accountable to do what we know we ought to do (John 14:26; 16:13-15). Those facilitating Bible studies can encourage participants toward an excellent professional reputation, toward daily worship and personal Bible study, and toward mediating on the breadth of Scripture (Galatians 6:1-10). Be willing to ask how their faith in Christ is holding fast.

Make space for prayer during every gathering of believers, whether meeting in-person or virtually. If you have deployed personnel joining the local Bible study through a type of technology system, seek their prayer needs early on in case the connection is lost or they must depart for duty. Prayer, as a regular and healthy part of every Bible study, gives members a chance to remember to pray for military leaders, for governmental authority, for the visible church, for deployed/TDY/TAD friends, for families, and for personal needs. Members need a safe Bible study environment to share with vulnerability and honesty, to wrestle over how to live faithfully, and then to receive the prayers of fellow saints.

13: Starting & Sustaining Fellowship

IN THIS CHAPTER

If a small group does not already exist, you can lead a PDO to ask God to grow a local OCF fellowship where you live. We challenge you to take a step of faith with others, and in doing so, may you be blessed by those who join in! Every group requires a willing leader to get started.

MEET TOGETHER

No two OCF local fellowship will look the same. We can describe OCF fellowship using our pillars by saying, OCF groups “Unite for Fellowship” that is “Centered on Scripture” and “Engaging in Prayer” so that all are “Equipped to Serve,” the “Family is Nurtured,” and Christians leave ready to “Integrate Faith and Profession.” The writer of Hebrews exhorts us to draw near to God, hold fast without wavering, and motivate one another toward love and good works within the context of meeting together (Hebrews 10:22-25). When thinking about starting or sustaining a local fellowship, consider how God has equipped and placed you so believers can better live out their Christian faith in the military context.

TAG! YOU'RE IT

Throughout the New Testament, we see examples of believers gathering for mutual encouragement and teaching. Cornelius, a Roman centurion, did not hesitate to gather his relatives and close friends to hear from Peter about what God had sent him to share. In a sense this was the start of military ministry, a gathering of Gentiles hosted by a military officer (Acts 10:24). How are we to exhort and love one another deeply if we do not spend time getting to know each other regularly (Hebrews 3:13; 10:24-25)? Just as commissioned officers bear the responsibility to lead the organizing, training, and equipping of military personnel, so too we ask OCF members to organize, gather, and facilitate the equipping of Christians in small-group Bible studies.

You have military leadership skills and credibility, so be courageous and gather others with you to study the Bible. If no OCF fellowship exists, or if you are unable to join a group nearby, then “Tag! You’re it.” Practice

hospitality, even if it feels awkward at first—you'll get better with time. And you don't have to do it alone or make it look perfect, simply open your home and life. Get ideas from those you know who seem to host well. Start your efforts with prayer, specifically a PDO, then focus on what will be a blessing to your guests. Spread the word that you are hosting a Bible study, get started, and keep meeting consistently as much as it is in your power to do so.

PRAY-DISCOVER-OBEY

Before you head off with the good idea of getting an OCF small group started, we exhort you to slow down and be still. Most have the tendency to ask God to bless well-intentioned ideas, but the better way to move forward is to ask God for wisdom first. James writes, "Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that'" (James 4:15). For amplified thoughts, see chapter titled, "Pray-Discover-Obey (PDO)."

CHAPLAINCY COORDINATION

Informing the chaplains that your OCF group is meeting will do several things. For starters, it keeps the chaplain(s) from being surprised to find out that there is a group of Christians gathering. The commander expects them to know about religious activities that affect the force. Further, chaplains advocate for your First Amendment freedoms, so informing them can help guard you from objections regarding your free exercise of religion. Also, commanders charge the chaplain's office to publicize and make Bible studies or fellowship groups visible to the military community, and they are a good resource for counsel and wisdom as you seek to establish appropriate parameters for your OCF gathering. We are not in competition with other Bible studies or fellowship gatherings, so open the door as wide as appropriate.

WHAT TO CALL YOUR OCF GROUP

How you name the local Bible study group has the potential to open the aperture to welcome all to participate. It can also help to define who you expect to regularly participate in the gathering. This is a good topic to cover during the Pray-Discover-Obey planning process. Should your local group use "OCF" in the name? Because OCF has brand recognition throughout the military, it is wonderful to call your group an OCF Bible study. However, if you are in a location where some may stumble over the OCF label, then feel free to use a Bible study group name that addresses your local situation so that spouses, children, and non-officers are

encouraged to gather every week. Example names for groups led by OCF members might be, “Family Bible Study,” “Base Housing Study,” or maybe even “[Location] Christian Fellowship.” Some groups have a specific purpose, and the name of the group can help identify why the group is gathering (e.g., Senior Leader Bible Study). These targeted groups might be for men, women, junior officers, commanders, etc.

BE CONSISTENT

Once you start an OCF gathering, keep it going and growing by faithfully gathering every week (or your specific interval) ... and prepare even if you think no one will be around. Many times, people are in town for only one week or weekend, and fellowship is critical for them. Other times a shift worker or recently returned member is finally able to join you in fellowship, so do not cancel on them. Leaders need to set an atmosphere for a reliable gathering that does not measure success based on who they think is able to attend. Pray for God to provide even one person to show up, and even if no one comes, your faithfulness is seen by the One who knows your heart. Try to meet at the same place and time so that habits can be developed. If the location gets changed too often then there is a risk that some may grow weary of trying find the meeting and give up. Same place, same day, same time gives the fewest excuses for attendees to say they forgot or did not know where to meet. Keep your door open and minister to whomever God brings. Reliable habits bless many.

If you are the primary host who must be out of town (or will be working late), consider leaving your key or code with a reliable person who will be able to arrive early, get the coffee and hot water started, turn on the lights, and then secure things at the end of fellowship. This provides a consistent day/time/location for the group to get together and helps gap those days when you cannot be present. Many OCFers who live in base housing have enjoyed the fact that front doors may not be locked, thus a key handoff isn't necessary.

BE READY TO LEAD EVERY TIME

You who belong to our Lord have an obligation to greet newcomers, say hello to old friends, love the household of faith, and to generally help create a warm atmosphere for gathering people together. Welcoming others into personal space isn't for extroverts alone. Introverted personalities share the love of Christ—they just need quiet recharge time. It is well known that food makes fellowship a bit better. Everyone requires nourishment, so meals or snacks can be a big blessing. If you do meals,

they can be potluck, a host-provided meal, ordered out, or the group can take turns bringing the meal.

Keep alert for unhealthy groupings (cliques) in which no one breaks out of their comfort zone. Simply going to a Bible study or small group is a stretching event for some people, so take the opportunity to set the example by reaching out to others with empathy and genuine love. Being the “new person” is tough, so welcome anyone you don’t recognize—and admit that you don’t know or remember their name. You may find out you met them previously, but taking time to say hello helps recover a poor memory.

Always prepare for Bible study with the assumption that you will have to lead. Military folks serve amid unplanned contingencies and short notice taskings. In some cases, we cannot even assume that the Bible study leader has time to prepare or is going to show up in good health. If you prepare to lead, but then do not actually have to do that, you will still be a great participant in the discussion (and you will get much more out of the study). Your weekly preparation is a way to meet “Commander’s Intent” from your Father above.

Plan for contingencies such as a short-notice deployment or TDY/TAD, or when someone becomes ill and is not able to host. During PDO, you can spend some time praying and talking about this, but you can also brainstorm later. How likely is it that your group might be impacted by obligations like exercises, inspections, combat operations, etc.? If you have a large group, the impact might be small, but if the group is smaller, be ready to adjust. It might be wise to have a primary and backup facilitator each week, and an alternate hosting location that can handle bad weather or sickness contingencies. Whatever arises, remember the Hebrews 10:25 exhortation to “consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,” and always try to meet together.

Regular preparation never ends, and since it is God who moves the hearts of individuals who are going to join in fellowship, pray for His sheep to gather. Pray for God to bring those who have been gone for a long time or for Him to send a person who is traveling through. Some weeks God may bring a new person who has heard about the group for a long time and only recently decided to check it out. Ask God to teach everyone from His Word. Pray for the host and for the leader, that they are ready to welcome the body and to lead. Pray for the weary to be refreshed. Pray for conviction that brings about obedience. Pray that your heart is open to the Spirit’s teaching and to participation.

14: Hosting & Facilitating Bible Study

IN THIS CHAPTER

It can be overwhelming to think about being the host or facilitator of a small group Bible study, so this chapter will be an encouragement to facilitators who wrestle with getting a group started on time, ended on time, or staying focused on the Bible text at hand. Prayer time usually needs expectations to be set with an explanation about how to proceed. We want our OCF leaders to be humble yet faithful to sound doctrine, and we need them to keep participants aware of events, retreats, and conferences that might be of interest.

STUDY THE BIBLE

It sounds obvious to say, “Study the Bible,” but there are so many great resources for groups to use that we must remind one another that we are gathering to study the Bible, so we must prioritize it. OCF groups should be known as those whose sole authority for life and daily integration of faith is the Bible, since it is God’s very words and wisdom given to His church for our growth and obedience (2 Timothy 3:16). Please open the Bible for weekly gatherings, even if you are using a book or video series to guide the study. It takes discipline to keep the weekly conversations centered on the Scriptures. Try asking open-ended questions (not yes/no questions) to strengthen the discussion. Prepare several questions ahead of time. You can seldom go wrong asking, “What does this text reveal about the Lord Jesus Christ?”, or “How do we see God’s holiness and faithfulness in what we are studying?”, or “What am I to do in response to what we’ve studied?” The whole of Scripture reveals the mystery of God’s plan to gather men and women from every nation into His one flock.

OCF’s booklet “Leading Effective Small Groups” is an outstanding resource for leaders. This and other items can be accessed through our website. Take time to peruse our Integrated Faith Project (ocfusa.org/ifproject), Bible studies written by military members, and the Toolkit for Leaders (ocfusa.org/toolkit). OCF members also have access to a RightNow Media library (large collection of videos).

Call the Home Office at (800) 424-1984 if you need help accessing these resources.

TIMELINESS MATTERS

If you have you ever felt trapped in a social setting, then you know why it is important for leaders to start and end on time. Starting on time makes it is easier to end on time. Honor your guests and participants by guarding their time and not presuming that they have nothing else to do. Assume that they have busy lives (tests to take, babysitters to rescue, and sleep to catch up on). If you are known for starting late, people will show up late. Consistently starting on time encourages people to show up on time. If you prove yourself unreliable for ending on time, then some might not come back. Loving your military community means you keep an eye on the clock.

INTRODUCTIONS/ICE BREAKERS

Share names (and maybe a fun personal fact) every time you get together. You, or someone else, probably needs to hear the names of everyone there, even if you think everyone knows names. This habit will make your environment comfortable for new attendees and for those who have just returned from deployment or TDY/TAD, plus the “fun fact” will help you get to know one another better. If you make this your habit, it will prevent awkward moments when everyone looks only at the new person or when a name is forgotten. Keep introductions consistent, short, and concise lest they consume a large amount of time.

FITTING IT ALL IN

Look at the personalities in your group and decide how to fit the various elements (music, introductions, prayer, Bible study, fellowship, etc.) into the time available. If you have verbal processors and storytellers, then introductions or prayer can take a larger amount of time and you will need to adjust. One way to ensure time for both prayer and Bible study is to begin with prayer so that once you start the Bible study you can simply pick a stopping point. It is easier to end at a particular verse than to cut someone off in the middle of their prayer. On the other hand, if you find that your group has a hard time giving enough attention to the Scriptures each week, then start with the study of the Bible and simply ask one person to pray as you wrap things up.

Another option is to have folks pray with sufficient detail that others can

agree with them as they are speaking to the Lord (no sharing is done prior to this kind of prayer time). That saves the minutes required to share prayer requests before praying for those same requests.

PRAYER IN A SMALL GROUP

Prayer time is easier if you will explain to the group how you will lead them through it. When a prayer concern seems to have a sensitive side to it, ask if what is shared should be held in confidence. If you forget to ask and they forget to say, assume that you should not share names and concerns without permission. Try to write enough notes that you can recall details later. Clarify that praying out loud is not mandatory and that there is no expectation for prayer to move around the circle with each person praying as the person beside them finishes. Every group is different, and time spent in prayer can cause stress when there is uncertainty. You can either ask people to share prayer requests and then pray for everything at once, or you can pray immediately after the prayer request is shared. If you wait to pray for everything at once, consider asking specific people to start or end the time in prayer. You might also encourage people to pray for things they remember once the heads are all bowed but that they forgot to mention during the request-taking time. Finally, some groups find encouragement in tracking prayer requests to see how God answers them, and if you have group consent, you can share the requests via email or a messaging app.

HUMILITY IN SMALL GROUP LEADERSHIP

It is a challenge to be wise regarding what we understand to be solid Christian beliefs while still allowing the group to wrestle with the text of Scripture by going down rabbit trails. Since all of us still have much to learn, don't try to correct every statement that you think fails to measure up to your level of orthodoxy. Staying humble is the only way to gently handle what may feel like problem areas in a Bible study. Guided by our heavenly Shepherd, we ourselves are always maturing, so we must respond with patience to the various challenges that come up during group study. If someone in your Bible study becomes contentious, the leader has the responsibility to be kind, patient, and gentle, confident that it is God who does the work of changing hearts and revealing truth (2 Timothy 2:22-26).

Our understanding of the Scriptures comes from the Holy Spirit giving us insight, not from our own cleverness. This truth helps inform the grace we extend to others who are walking with us in this process

of sanctification (growing to be more like Christ). You should guide the conversations enough to keep the Bible study on track while simultaneously praying in your mind for the Holy Spirit to be at work in all that is said and shared by those present. Consider it a blessing if the discussion goes to a place that you never intended it to go, confident that God is sovereign over the study and the rabbit trails that might be helpful to others. Guard your heart from anger when things seem to get derailed. Keep your confidence in our God who has brought the group together. These people are His sheep, not yours. It helps to take a mental step back and trust that He is at work in the hearts of His flock. For additional resources and further thoughts on leading groups with difficult people (those who dominate, avoid, disrupt, or in some way create friction), check out our Leaders Toolkit at ocfusa.org/toolkit.

TELL ABOUT “BIG OCF”

Take time to talk about what is happening in the larger OCF body, about retreats at the conference centers, things you have heard about in the local social net, etc. Of course, this assumes that you are receiving the big picture OCF materials—they come in paper and digital forms. Please do not unsubscribe or opt out of OCF updates, because you need the updates to keep your local OCF group informed. If there is no time for announcements when the group meets, consider using group-wide communication (group app, social media, email, etc.) on a regular basis to keep members abreast of whatever might be helpful information for them. It often takes multiple invitations before an OCF member attends their first OCF retreat at a conference center, but most guests return repeatedly after their first conference or retreat. You never know what God might do with the information you share; your regular encouragement and communication might help someone take a purposeful rest.

HELP OUT

If you are not leading the Bible study or small group that you are part of, then help whoever is hosting or leading. Ask what needs to be done and look for ways you can serve. If the leader is hosting the Bible study group at their own place, offer to bring food, extra chairs, cups/bowls/plates/silverware. Set up and clean up takes time and energy, so offer to show up early or stick around afterwards to clean up and take out the garbage. A quick text when you are on the way might allow you to pick up a needed item en route. Pray for wisdom to help, because many hosts/leaders typically do most prep and cleanup on their own.

15: Transitions & Handoffs

IN THIS CHAPTER

Ensure you stay connected to Biblical fellowship through a PCS or TDY/TAD. You and your group can use the OCF Directory, OCF staff, and friends who can help connect people in various locations. The habits and rhythm of TDY/TAD locations and new assignments tend to be established in the first days and weeks after arrival, so join a local body to find fellowship and worship right away.

YOU ARE ARRIVING

Transition times are a great reason to check the OCF website (**ocfusa.org/directory**) for a local leader and fellowship at your TDY/TAD or new living location. If a fellowship already exists, join in and get involved right away. “First-month decisions” tend to become your fixed habits for the rest of an assignment, so commit soon and commit hard. After that initial commitment, it will be more natural to persevere in the new rhythm.

If there is no group or leader in your area, pray about how to proceed and get ready to host a PDO. You can fill out the “List Me” form on OCF’s website and become the OCF Contact or Local Leader, then initiate your PDO to get a group gathered. Meet the chaplains, pray for them, and keep them advised as you proceed. Keep using the Pray-Discover-Obey process throughout all your major decisions, and repeat it for every new assignment or deployment. You take the good news of Jesus Christ into the military community where you serve. Start leading today and stay on mission. (*See the chapters on PDO and on Starting and Sustaining Fellowship.*)

YOU ARE DEPARTING

Departing transitions are the gateways that must be passed through for a small group or Bible study to move from being a one-and-done gathering into a long-term presence of the installation and local Christian fellowship. OCF knows the challenge of sustaining local fellowships that begin under the tutelage of an enterprising individual

or couple, but then struggle to be sustained. Thriving groups sometimes vanish once that individual or couple moves elsewhere. As a leader (or member) of a small group, help ensure that your small group/Bible study makes the transition between one leader PCSing and another taking the leadership.

FACING CHANGE

This process of baton-passing might sound daunting, but it simply entails taking ownership of the transition process. Just like when there is no Bible study or small group near you and the responsibility falls to you to start one, so also the responsibility falls to you to either pick up or hand off the baton when the Bible study/group leader is PCSing. If you are the departing leader, strive to hand off the baton to someone who is qualified to lead the group and host regular meetings. Not everyone will have a vision for keeping a local fellowship group going, so do your best to communicate the vision of why military fellowship and Bible study are important. You might be able to stir up a group effort to share the load of hosting, facilitating, and leading weekly gatherings, but there should be one person who accepts final responsibility.

USE PDO

PDO is extremely helpful for any transition process. Ask the Lord for wisdom to see who might carry the baton going forward, and be open to the fact that the answer might surprise you. Use Scriptural principles (i.e., someone with a good reputation, known for hospitality) and a sense of who will persevere in the role (Titus 2:1-10). Ask who is present and able to step up and lead. Is there anyone affiliated with OCF who is transitioning to your location? Ask the OCF Home Office if they know of anyone in the area or heading your way. Ultimately, however, we trust God with the sustainment of His body even as we work hard to be faithful stewards of influence and connections.

Make a deliberate “ask” of the next leader, and take time to share information and knowledge that will help the transition. The local OCF body may actually grow healthier because of the transition due to the stress and uncertainty that cause people to be more God-reliant, and it guards the group from dependence on a particularly charismatic or dynamic leader. Once again, we petition God for grace and mercy, that He would keep the OCF group from an inappropriate sense of loss and move it toward greater maturity. Remain confident that every PCS and every transition is from God’s hand.

STAY IN TOUCH

After you PCS—either as a leader or as a member—remember that your advocacy for the body does not end. Look backwards and see how the fellowship you just left is doing. Ask how you can pray for and support them. Consider whether you can return for a quick visit. Do not let fellowship starve over distance. Keep your eyes open for fellow believers who might be visiting the area you left so you can link them up. Do your best to encourage, exhort, and challenge without heaping burdens and loads on those in your previous group.

16: Christian Mentoring

IN THIS CHAPTER

Mentors need mentees, and mentees need mentors. This two-way process of spurring one another on in Christian faith, specifically in the context of Christian and professional living, is Christian mentoring. This chapter gives ideas for starting, developing, and sustaining a mentoring relationship and for making transitions.

DRAW NEAR, SPEND TIME

Luke 24:15-32 pictures a Christ-like mentorship from Christ Himself as He drew near to Cleopas and another disciple on the road to Emmaus, walked with them, asked questions, ate with them, and explained the fulfillment of Scripture. “While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. ... And He said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself ... They said to each other, ‘Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road, while He opened to us the Scriptures?’” Similarly, mentors can draw near, walk with others, ask good questions, and help consider modern events in light of the Scriptures.

We all need someone to come alongside us, spend time with us, explain Scripture, and help us apply it to our lives. Christian mentoring grows us spiritually, relationally, and professionally. God has so arranged us within the body of the church that we are able to exercise our gifts and abilities for the good of the whole (1 Corinthians 12:14-26). We learn by spending time with experienced individuals, imitating and practicing what they do. We mature by hearing of God’s faithfulness throughout history and by applying the Scriptures to our lives. We then act on what we learn, circling back around to receive feedback. We define Christian mentorship as the trusting relationship between a mentor and a mentee within the context of God’s Word and the Holy Spirit’s focus on spiritual maturity. Christian mentoring aims for spiritual maturity by integrating the truth of Scripture with professional and daily life.

MENTOR RESPONSIBILITY

Whether you still wear the uniform, or have taken it off, the Christian leader bears a responsibility to mentor and walk alongside someone else. We should all engage in both discipling (growing believers and equipping workers) and in mentoring. OCF uses the term “Christian Mentoring” as a way to describe a blend of Christian discipleship and professional mentoring; how much of each will depend on the mentee’s need and the mentor’s experience and wisdom in each (see figure below). You might be surprised at how things that you think are routine are a great encouragement to someone who is at a different phase of life. Paul wasn’t bashful when he said, “What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:9). Others are blessed when you give your time to listen and encourage them in Christian growth, and you are blessed when someone does the same for you. Pray for the right person to mentor you and pray also for a person whom you can mentor. The hardest part of establishing a mentor-mentee relationship may simply be in taking the initiative to ask someone else to meet with you regularly.

Christian mentoring relationships will mature both the mentor and mentee—spiritually, professionally, relationally, and mentally. Godly relationships enable Christians to stay in the spiritual fight, to persevere in the face of challenges and suffering, and able to do good works within our community. The Apostle Peter exhorts us to, “make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:5-8). Meeting with another person who will remind us of God’s good work in our lives should then stir us toward obedient action that demonstrates love for God and love for our neighbor.

BEGINNING THE RELATIONSHIP

Perseverance is required after you initiate and develop a mentoring relationship, and this is true for both the mentor and mentee. Establishing a rhythm that meshes two busy lives together is often hard. So keep calling, texting, or emailing until you have enough success in meeting that the relationship is less likely to fail. Tom Hemingway, former director of Spring Canyon, recommended we pray for our mentee daily, call or

communicate with them weekly, and try to see them face-to-face at least monthly. You sought out the person you want to meet with because you saw something in their experience, time of life, or spiritual maturity that drew you to speak to them about mentoring, so if an appointment is forgotten, or if someone arrives late, show grace and patience. As far as it is in your power, work toward a deepening relationship.

DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN TRUST

Christian mentoring encompasses an interpersonal relationship that leads toward spiritual growth for both parties. This growth happens in an environment of increasing knowledge and trust of the other person. Chat about life. Learn the names of those who are important to the other person. Listen to their story of coming to faith in Christ Jesus and rejoice with them in God's calling. Get to know them. Ask questions. Listen. Take notes. Avoid distractions. Keep the Scriptures front and center. The goal is to develop as obedient Christians. That means allowing the Holy Spirit to teach you through the Scriptures to think like a Christian and then learning to act like a Christian. Pray regularly even as you are listening to your mentor or mentee—pray especially for wisdom to answer with spiritual wisdom and not your own. Begin and end mentoring moments in a time of prayer. Mentors, ask the Holy Spirit to give insight into areas of life where the mentee is struggling, and honor the mentee's time by being on time and ending on time.

With few exceptions, mentoring relationships among Christians will be men with men and women with women, guarding us from accusation or intimacy problems. Godly Christian mentoring begins with a personal pursuit of holiness before God, understanding the male and female roles God has given us (e.g., Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Timothy 3:2-13; 5:1-16; Titus 2:1-8), and steering clear of temptations that might arise in the setting of a long-term mentor-mentee relationship. If you are married, and meeting with a couple is an option, consider the possibility of you and your spouse entering a mentoring relationship with both husband and wife. This has the advantage of developing a stronger marriage in the context of military life and ministry.

TRANSITIONS

When should a mentoring relationship end? Have this conversation when you start the mentoring relationship and again in future months and years. It is possible that a PCS or TDY/TAD will put an end to regular engagement, but you could also decide to use long-distance

technology to keep meeting. If it is healthy to do so, stay in touch and follow up occasionally to see how the other person is doing. When praying for the other person, send them a text to tell them you are thinking of them. Simple touch points can maintain some level of connectivity with one another, especially when you are aware that the other person is wrestling with enduring sin challenges. If you prove yourself to be trustworthy and able to hold confidence, it should not surprise you that new people will seek you out as a mentor because of your reputation.

GODLY WISDOM

Finally, mentors must guard their hearts against pride and self-assurance. Since mentors do not have answers for every situation, sometimes the best thing in a mentoring relationship is the opportunity to work through a tough question together. As the mentor, admit that you do not have an immediate answer, assure the other person that you will help find one, and then do the research simultaneously. Vulnerability regarding how you live life will deepen a solid mentoring relationship, so be willing to share successes and failures, joys and disappointments. Ask good questions to draw out the other person, but also be willing to give thoughtful answers when you are asked a question.

Men and women who enter the military often have a high need for affirmation and for action. Many of them are not aware of the craving they have to be recognized as competent or to have a good public reputation. Within the military we are prone to develop leaders whose internal identity becomes rooted in their uniformed successes. This is one of the reasons military leaders do well to have Christian military mentors, and for OCFers who have already served to eagerly look for younger men and women to mentor. Experienced mentors should be able to help their mentees maintain spiritual integrity within the context of the profession.

GUIDED BY SCRIPTURE

Both mentor and mentee will do well to examine the Scriptures beginning with Genesis, working to remember God's work throughout history. The finished work of Christ, and the hope of all that will be made right at His return, ought to provide the context for most mentoring conversations. Challenge one another toward daily Scripture study, personal and corporate prayer, weekly worship with the gathered

body, and toward developing the habits of self-discipline that will benefit the greater church body in later years. Encourage membership in a local church where one can be known and not hidden or unknown. Go to the “Local Church” chapter for further thoughts.

For more information regarding becoming a Mentor, a Mentee, or to host a local Mentoring Program, resources are available online at **ocfusa.org/mentoring**.

17: The Military Chaplaincy

IN THIS CHAPTER

Our nation is blessed to have a military chaplaincy, and OCF wants its members to reach out to their chapel staff, build good relationships with them, and seek to bless the chaplain teams whenever possible. We are careful to say that we support the chaplaincy, but we do not ask members to support a particular chaplain or chapel program. Supporting the chaplaincy can be done whether the doctrine and theology of a particular chaplain or religious affairs professional are Christian or not, since they remain responsible for implementing the commander's religious program.

SUPPORT REGARDLESS OF RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

When OCF says that we support the chaplaincy, we are making a statement about the critical nature of the free exercise of religion for the entire military community. Our nation assigns professionals to ensure religious accommodation without mandating denomination, creed, or spiritual allegiance. Since every chaplain is charged to advocate for free exercise of religion and freedom of speech, leaders should seek chaplains out as advisors and counselors, especially in matters where there is an intersection of faith, family, and profession. Leaders work hard to know their unit personnel, so what better person to consult than the chaplain, if the chaplain has the pulse of unit morale, installation stresses, and the effect of policies on force readiness?

Supporting the chaplaincy does not require a check to see if we agree theologically with our chaplains. We can hold fast to faith in Christ alone while simultaneously loving every chaplain. We care about them and their families, and we should care about them spiritually, personally, and professionally. You might be the only leader who makes an effort to see how your chaplain is doing.

It takes time to build relational trust, so make it a habit to stop in and see your chaplain(s). If you don't know your chaplains, then they almost certainly don't know you. Get to know as much of the chaplaincy staff as possible. Some chaplains will be gifted in trauma response, some in

preaching, some in family counseling, some in listening. Learn from them—they will appreciate that you care.

GOOD COMMUNICATION IS ESSENTIAL

Tell the chapel staff about Bible studies, prayer groups, and fellowships in the local area so that they can point inquiring individuals in your direction. This helps them keep the commander informed on religious accommodation activities and prevents your chaplain from being surprised when they hear about a gathering.

It helps if you keep abreast of how laws and regulations are protecting or restricting free exercise of religion. Remembering that, like you, chaplains are serving under the authority of a secular state, so if you learn to speak the language of chaplaincy regulations you can become a helpful partner to them in word and action. Unlike you, however, they must be faithful to their endorsing body's doctrinal requirements.

Ask your chaplain to explain what an endorsing body means to them. Endorsers approve and send pastors into the military, provide top cover through policy letters, and maintain the ministry credentials for uniformed service. Without these credentials, a chaplain is not allowed to remain in the military.

Consider how your professional role, spiritual giftings, or personal abilities might bless and extend the work of the chaplaincy. Help out where you can but realize that not every chaplain will be enthusiastic about parachurch participation. Some carry with them the pain of previously unhealthy parachurch experiences. The chapel staff should accommodate your OCF group in a manner similar to what they provide other religious groups.

PRACTICAL WAYS TO SUPPORT THE CHAPLAINCY

Pray for chaplains, their families, their staffs, and their congregations. Pray privately, as a family, and as an OCF group. This has the benefit of helping the OCF group get to know the chaplains better. If a chaplain team is connected to your unit, plan to hail and farewell them or find some way to appreciate them.

Many new chaplains come with extensive pastoral experience but have little military administrative experience. Some chaplains may ask for help navigating DoD's promotions, assignments, awards, and

decorations. Here are ideas for loving your chaplain(s) and staff:

- Visit with them. Learn their names and stories ... who are they? Speak words of encouragement, thanks, and if appropriate, ask to pray for them before you leave their office.
- Attend a chapel service or participate in a chapel program.
- Invite the chaplain to visit your unit. Be the escort, helping others to know who their chaplain is.
- Sit together during mandatory/highly encouraged functions so your chaplain (and spouse) doesn't feel isolated, especially during unit social events.
- Invite chaplains to your home for dinner, to Bible study, prayer, etc. Invite them even if they never come.

18: Chapel Programs

IN THIS CHAPTER

Chapel programs vary widely among military installations and among the branches of the military, but chapels are generally a place where religious conversations are welcomed and where Christians can serve to make the gospel of Jesus Christ visible. They are great places to grow in appreciation for people from different spiritual, denominational, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. This chapter explores ways to be a representative of Christ wherever you are assigned, ways to support the Command Religious Program (or similar), and how to nest that participation within local church membership.

GO WHERE THE PEOPLE ARE

If you view the military society as the people among whom you will live as salt and light, then consider where the meeting places of that society are. Paul usually entered the synagogues of a city, and in this way he began local community outreach by meeting where God's Word was being taught (Acts 9:20; 13:5, 14; 14:1; 17:1, 10; 18:4, 19). Think about where missionaries and aid worker live, shop, and teach within the community they desire to impact. They typically would not live away from the very people they go to help. It would be awkward to tell a native people that you have arrived to help and serve them, but that for reasons of financial growth opportunity, or for family educational needs, or for better access to shopping areas, you plan to live outside their village. Any attempt to assure them that you really want to know them better will probably ring hollow. To become a friend and a servant to the military community means that you should consider putting your interests aside and dwelling among those you serve. Open your life to the scrutiny of others in the hope that they will allow you to be part of their lives. Developing trust begins with physical presence.

Similarly, OCF's vision (the military community positively impacted through Christ-like leaders) invites leaders to be Christ-like servants within the military society. To become trusted, you will need to live where military people live. In some of these locations, the community

will have a robust chapel program, so if you are committed to OCF's mission (Christ-like service at the intersection of faith, family, and profession), we ask you to pray about how to connect with the chapel body. This should probably not be exclusive of local church participation, since your local church membership may be where you are spiritually nourished and sent out. (See *"Local Church Membership" chapter*.) Military members can become volunteers in the command religious program by being trained as religious lay leaders who meet the needs of the Christian faith group when chaplains are not available to provide for your free exercise of religion.

GOOD RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

Developing good relationships with the chaplain(s) and chapel staff will expand opportunities to benefit the entire military community—adults and children. Since an OCF leader does not organize a local OCF fellowship as a Non-Federal Entity (NFE) that requests base access, collects funds, or seeks exclusive facility access, you are not required to sign NFE agreements with the installation on behalf of OCF. In most cases, OCF members will fall into the category of a participant in chapel activities, or they become a chapel volunteer whom the local chaplains will train, certify, and equip in that role. Chapel programs vary among service branches and locations, so learn what the local chaplains provide, what they desire help with, and how to pray for them. Contact the OCF staff if you need help interpreting chaplaincy programming or instructions.

Not every chapel program should be supported, and there may be programs you have to step away from because your presence as a Christ follower will be perceived as supporting activities contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ. There may be specific assignments when you are not able to teach and disciple your own children within the context of a poor chapel program, and in these instances, you might step away from visible support of the chapel. Love everyone, be known for holding fast to the truth God has revealed in the Scripture, and be a healthy participant who brings the good news of life through faith in God's only Son, Jesus Christ.

By supporting the chaplaincy, you have the opportunity to see and touch parts of the military community you might not otherwise meet. Chapel participation develops a serving posture, enhances outreach, and permits evangelism. Like other laborers sent from established church bodies, chaplains may provide chapel services where TDY/TAD

personnel worship, either because it is the only option or because there is no transportation off the installation. Make yourself available to meet TDY/TAD and newly arrived personnel. Chapel programs provide a refuge for everyone—the healthy and vibrant as well as isolated, marginalized, lonely, and hurting members of the military community. You know that hurting people serve with you, yet few of us wear our pain visible on the outside. Pray for the ability to live as a warm and loving presence among all people. There is so much diversity within chapel programs that you will probably be changed for the rest of your life as you learn to appreciate men and women from many different church and spiritual backgrounds. Being in the chapel is one way you can be salt and light, reaching out to the military community with the love of Christ just as He has loved you (Luke 7:47).

BE A SERVANT, NOT SIMPLY THE SERVED

The normal posture of a believer in Christ is not, “How can I be served?” but rather “How can I serve?” Serving takes energy. We will usually be short on time, and we may face opposition when it becomes known that we hold Biblical standards of truth, but we must still care about the souls and lives of those God has placed around us. For example, if there is no children’s/youth program, then maybe the OCF members can band together to start a program with their own children. Not every opportunity needs to be addressed, but having a willing heart is the beginning of impacting lives.

You will likely experience chapel activities that are not Biblically sound, but do not let that scare you off. You can participate as a Christian who brings good doctrine with you. Poor teaching frequently exists because of immaturity or ignorance, not because of malicious intent. If you are in Christ, then the good news of God’s work through Jesus Christ goes with you wherever you go. Invite the people you meet to come into your home for a meal and fellowship. Embrace the chapel community whenever it is in your power to reach out in love. Be discerning about Biblical truth, and pay attention to whether the correct gospel of Jesus Christ is being preached (Galatians 1:6-9). This discernment will inform your decision as to whether to bring unbelievers to the chapel or to volunteer.

If you are finding ways to serve within a chapel community that doesn’t have much solid Christian instruction, then alert your church to the situation, and ask them to help you in your own walk. Local church oversight can enable chapel community involvement while simultaneously guarding your family’s spiritual growth and obedience.

Chapel programs are not meant to replace the visible church. Local churches provide the gathering of Christ's body with essentials like the teaching of Scripture, baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the discipline of its members. Chapel programs may provide some of these things for particular moments of time, but one thing chaplains do not have authority to do is to discipline chapel participants toward repentance and reconciliation.

Rather, military chapel programs help prepare chaplains for deployed ministry, they provide family outreach and connectivity, and they enable English-speaking services in overseas locations. Some programs focus on resilience and outreach, but the nature and character of the services change every couple of years as chaplains come and go. In some places, weekly worship services have been discontinued to reprioritize the use of chaplain time and energy. Nonetheless, military chapel settings provide an opportunity for us to enjoy the diversity and beauty of spiritual traditions and worships styles that are different from our "normal" style.

19: Nurturing the Family

IN THIS CHAPTER

Our enduring and eternal family relationship is that which God has established through His adoption of those of us who belong to Christ. In light of this, we no longer look at one another as acquaintances and friends, but as brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters. These relationships define how we do life together.

THE MEANING OF FAMILY

There are two different ways to use the term “family.” The first describes the enduring and eternal relationship Christians have with one another because of our adoption by God as children. In this relationship, we are called brothers and sisters by our Lord Jesus Christ, all of us co-heirs looking forward to a future in God’s presence. The second way is to speak of a societal unit related by blood or adoption, usually made up of father, mother, children, and relatives.

FAMILY THROUGH UNION IN CHRIST

The Bible speaks of God’s people being son or daughter, mother or father, sister or brother. In a letter that is full of family relationships, Paul instructs Timothy to “not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity” (1 Timothy 5:1-2). In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes, “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ ...” (Romans 8:16-17). These verses capture the essence of how we are related to one another through our union with Christ. Faith in Christ, in His full obedience and completed work, means that we share in what the Father has promised us through the Son. In contrast to this Christ-union family, Jesus warned that family members (blood relatives) may deliver one another over to death, and we may be hated by all for Jesus’ sake (Matthew 10:21-22), yet Christ assures us that He was hated before we were. Since our first allegiance is to Christ Jesus, we care for members of His family. The ties of Christ’s blood-bought family are stronger and more enduring than earthly family.

FAMILY BY MARRIAGE, BIRTH, ADOPTION

The second way to talk about family is to speak of that social unit made up of children and parents. This is the priority relationship each of us participates in as long as we have living relatives. In the Ten Commandments, we are directed to “honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12). In the book of Hebrews, we find the instruction, “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous” (Hebrews 13:4). Scripture leaves no doubt that men and women are to care for their relatives, and if “anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (1 Timothy 5:8). In God’s economy, the unbelieving spouse of a believer is made holy through the marriage relationship that is shared, thus the children of a believing parent are declared holy (clean, set apart). Paul asks, “how do you know whether you will save your wife/husband?” (1 Corinthians 7:12-16). God declares the blood family relationship to be essential, and He instructs us through Moses, saying that parents are to diligently teach love for God and obedience to all His words and commands (Deuteronomy 6:4-13).

FUN ACTIVITIES, COMMUNICATION, AND GROWTH

What activities come to mind when you think of families being together? Even if your childhood did not provide a healthy example, consider that God has adopted you into His family so you can eat food, watch movies, and play games together! Kitchens, yards, parks, gardens, campgrounds, beaches, mountains, and living rooms have the potential to be great places for OCF “family” fellowship. Get together and learn to have fun with others. Pay attention to the needs, hurts, and concerns of others, and look for an opportunity to help. Mothers and fathers who don’t have a spouse at home may be blessed by having another adult come alongside their children to play, tutor, or reinforce truth. Finally and importantly, do Sunday worship together, whether every week or by joining one another on special occasions.

When you go TDY/TAD, tell the OCF body at your temporary location about how your OCF family “back home” is doing, and then tell your local family back home how brothers and sisters are doing in the locations you just visited. These are great opportunities to see the bigger picture of Christian evangelism and discipleship. You can be the initiator of relationship building that connects diverse Christian

ministries together by first meeting the various leaders and then introducing them to one another (some may have already met). OCF members, especially our leaders, should not see relationships as “belonging” to them or to OCF. We trust that God uses the skills of each ministry to serve the larger military community and the church. We are blessed to have organizations like ACCTS, Club Beyond, Cru Military, Navigators, Planting Roots, Valor, etc., alongside OCF. The sheep of Christ’s church really belong to Him—not to any organization or ministry.

When you are in forward/deployed areas, you can help the resilience of others (single and married) by reminding one another to stay in good communication with home, to support one another in daily devotional habits, to grow in faith while deployed, and to attend worship together. It really helps when you, the OCF member, adopt the attitude that “my first area of ministry” is to those within military society. When we experience personal trials, especially ones that cut us to the quick, our heart’s response will help show us, and others, what we value and worship. If ugly responses flow out of our mouth, or even into our mind, God is giving us a glimpse of where He needs to be invited to change us. The Holy Spirit already dwells within every believer in Christ, so ask Him to do some surgical work! Christ’s completed work is applied to us as we confess our sin and our need for change, we repent and seek forgiveness, and we rest in the confidence that Christ’s righteousness is applied to our account. Share what is going on with a brother, sister, father, or mother, and allow them to walk with you through life.

THE NEXT GENERATION

Do your best to impact all ages, because the day is coming when you will be older than those now serving. Train the generation that is coming along behind you. Rejoice in any diversity that leads to a more beautiful expression of the gospel. Christ has reconciled the world (people from every nation and language) to Himself, and He has given us the responsibility to be His messengers of reconciliation. Because God placed all our sin on Christ, and gave all of Christ’s righteousness to us, we can be effective ambassadors of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:16-21). Honor one another, submitting to Christ so that His body will have joints and ligaments knitting it together (Colossians 2:19; Ephesians 4:15-16). Maturing family ties require personal fellowship and immediate proximity to others where we connect in person and express right relationships that glorify God.

20: Singles, Couples, Children

IN THIS CHAPTER

The family of Christ has been commanded to love our neighbor together—singles, couples, and children all loving our neighbor. Singles have great freedom in action and can focus on serving one Lord and Master. Marriage, as God gave it to His creation, is between one man and one woman (Genesis 1:26-31; 2:18-25; Matthew 19:4-6). The blessing of marriage is that the labor of two people is multiplied, and the home becomes a place to develop and grow toward greater effectiveness in outreach. Those who have children get to develop within them a vision that they are part of the parent’s military calling and spiritual work.

THE FREEDOM OF SINGLENES

Single individuals without children have a freedom to be flexible and spontaneous that is different from those who are married, or those who have children. The apostle Paul focused on singleness in his first letter to the Corinthians, saying, “the unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord ... And the unmarried ... woman is anxious about the thing of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit” (1 Corinthians 7:32-34). Singleness may last for a few years, or it may be for a lifetime. Whatever the case, take advantage of the freedom to bless others, to volunteer, to be flexible when others must care for their families, and so on. Paul wrote his instructions to the Corinthians, “to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord” (v. 35). Singles have one Master and are able to submit to one Lord without the distractions of a marriage relationship. Married couples can bless singles through hospitality, since many enjoy being in homes where children are polite, loving, and willing to interact with the adults. Children who have been trained to be comfortable with guests will amplify the fun, vulnerable, relational aspect of a home.

THEY ARE WATCHING: THE FAMILY AS SALT AND LIGHT

How you live, talk, drive, shop, and play as a family will be the aroma of Christ to the world. Daily conversations and the habits of home have

a way of proclaiming your priorities, making Christ Jesus visible to family, friends, and house guests. Even if you tend to stay quiet, the children often tell family details that surprise the adults. Deuteronomy 6:1-9 commands what is a normal, everyday declaration of truth, “The Lord our God, the Lord is one ... And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” We keep the Word of God before ourselves day and night and regularly proclaim it by how we live. Consider whether others will hear God’s truths from your lips and see them in your actions.

We make other decisions that reveal both the kingship of God and the priorities we live. Family finances, our use of time, where we choose to live, and who we allow to be part of our lives, are all areas that give us a glimpse of whether we are developing a temporal or eternal mindset. Either we seek to use our resources and energy to impact souls today, or else we will prioritize pursuits of comfort, happiness, or other distractions that cause us to fritter away our limited time on earth. Are you regularly inviting others into your life to show them friendship, community, and Christ-like love? Earthly assets should bless others. If you are single, you might find you have more freedom because you have fewer people to coordinate decisions with than a married person. If you have a roommate, honor them by asking how often and when you might open your room, apartment, or home for hospitality or Bible study.

GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY

Teach and regularly remind one another of God’s sovereignty as He brings about His purposes through the everyday decisions and actions of His people. Speak of His goodness. Have conversations about separation, loss, and death, even speaking of preparation in case a uniformed member of your family is killed, taken prisoner, or goes missing. God is working out His plans (Proverbs 16:1-9), so we worship Him amid pain, uncertainty, and loss (Job 40:8; 42:1-6). Decide ahead of time that while His ways are not always understandable, we are confident they are best. Consider that assignments are not only for the person in uniform, but for the household as well. Strive to keep the family together by moving as one household to assignments that permit you to be accompanied. Many families have paid out of pocket to arrange their own housing, even when the military didn’t pay for the move, since they counted emotional, relational, and spiritual health more important than things like education, music, sports, house ownership, separate jobs, etc.

PRACTICE MAKES BETTER

Practice forgiveness, love, and reconciliation within your family so that you can act the same way with those outside your family as well. Recognizing our sin and brokenness helps us to be humble about our own faults—especially when others get close to us and confront us about those faults. Even as we struggle against the faults of our own nature, we are not to shirk from the discipline and training of our children to be the sort of people who can serve the Lord in all that He has for them (Proverbs 13:24; Hebrews 12:7-11). Yet do so with gentleness and self-control.

Lessons we learn in the messy relationships we have with friends, spouses, and children will translate into our better decisions as leaders in our communities and workplaces. Within your home, ask for God’s help to become the person you would like to be outside of it. Seek to be a Christian leader, helper, elder, and mentor, managing your household well and caring for your relatives (1 Timothy 3:4-5, 12; 5:4, 8, 14). Do not avoid wrestling with the conflict of relationships or the hard situations that come your way. Seek God’s grace to overcome any introverted tendencies you might use as an excuse from living in community with others.

Whether you are single or married, you are only on this earth for a short time. Have a sense of urgency. Use the time you have for God’s glory—using each segment of time (season of life, TDY/TAD, deployment, time between PCS moves) to make God and His Word heard, seen, and felt by those around you. Go love your neighbor in a way that is unique to you.

CHILDREN ARE A BLESSING

Scripture declares that children are a blessing from God (Psalm 127), and that God’s normative work on earth is accomplished through the offspring of His people (Genesis 17:7; Acts 2:39). God alone opens and closes the womb (Genesis 30:2, 22; 1 Samuel 1:6, 19; Psalm 139:13; Luke 1:13; John 9:1-3). Being willing to have children and trust God with all His rich provision is putting faith into action. Obey what the Holy Spirit teaches you in Scripture about what it means to desire a fruitful marriage, and do not be anxious that they have been brought into a military family in which there are frequent moves, long hours, and deployments. Those things will be good for them as God develops the character of children in the context of your military life.

Life in the military is tougher on some marriages and families than

others, but we can generalize and say that military service requires adaptation that isn't found in some other careers. Military duty often results in long duty days, separation, dangerous deployments, or similar experiences for you or your family. Knowing that you are obeying the Lord as completely as possible, and with a clear conscience, will be a comfort that helps sustain you through long days, deployments, and other trials. These times of personal and relational testing will look different for every generation of uniformed military professionals, yet there remains a camaraderie among the generations, because military life has always been tough on individuals, marriages, and families.

Help children find joy in learning the language, customs, and courtesies of military life as they live within the culture where God has placed you. You can help them find meaningful fulfillment as members of the big-picture purpose God is accomplishing through your family (1 Timothy 3:4-5). This way of thinking is useful whenever your family becomes involved in the work of the church. Seek to have your whole family involved in whatever the Lord sends you to do. Dual military couples might spend more time than others working to discern what to volunteer for, how long both might stay in the military, and how to use their various gifts to serve the military society.

FAMILY MINISTRY

If you are convinced that you and your family are called to serve within the military community, then meet together in Pray-Discover-Obey sessions to see how you can get everyone invested in the mission God has put before you. These PDO meetings might be monthly or quarterly but should be repeated at least annually. In the PDO process, it is helpful to hear from the different perspectives of family members and to think about possible family adjustments that are needed. PDO gives each person the opportunity to talk through expectations and apprehensions. You can strategize ways your whole family can equip and prepare themselves to serve as effectively as possible in your mission field. What are ways you can train and equip yourselves for perseverance and sustainment in the field (Hebrews 10:36)?

The children of Christian believers ought to have the privilege of growing up in a home where Scripture is read to them regularly, where they can ask tough questions about life and death, where forgiveness and reconciliation are demonstrated within secure and loving relationships, and where they are trained to be polite and respectful both in their own home and outside. Many children do not have parents who read to them, or who are willing

to talk about sickness, death, and eternity, or who can extend forgiveness because God has forgiven them so much. If your children sit with you at a meal, remember that most kids in the neighborhood do not regularly have opportunities to sit down to a meal with parents and siblings. To be honest, your home is unlike the cultural norm if you provide a loving environment by spending time together over meals, around board games, and if you train your children to know truth.

CHILDREN HAVE SPECIAL ACCESS

Now think about the fact that your children have access into the lives and homes of the military community in ways that adults are not free to trespass. They probably do not care what a friend's family rank is, and they do not withhold their love for others because of the military role someone fills. The transparency of children often allows them to say true things without giving or taking unnecessary offense. The embrace and kind words of a child have a universal impact that requires little interpretation, and the focused attention of a teenager who actively listens to an adult will greatly encourage a cynic who thinks that the younger generation is without hope.

Teaching our children to know and love God should mean they are also learning to love their neighbor. Youth often grasp the idea of being a neighbor faster than we might expect. Pay attention to whether your children are quick to be a neighbor to hurting people, seeing them like the Samaritan who stopped to help the man who fell among robbers (Luke 10:25-37). While you can encourage compassion and love for others, parents can create the opportunities and environments for children to be stretched out of their comfort zone. Invite guests into your home, but before they arrive, talk with the children about God owning everything in the home, how to behave, questions they can ask to stir conversation, and practical things like offering drinks, taking a coat, or playing with the children of your guests. If our children are with us when we go to someone else's home, we should think about similar conversations that will prepare us to bless our hosts and minimize stress. Give the children enough guidelines for playing in your neighborhood that they will be known as peacemakers, helpers, fun, and as those who are careful around other people's property (such as cars, flower beds, windows, tools, etc.).

In previous chapters we encouraged you to expand the focus of a family PDO to include your children and their lives. Expanding the PDO will help military offspring see themselves as valued participants (active

laborers) in the work of having a positive impact on the community in the name of Jesus Christ. What are the passions that God has given them? Whether it is music, science, teaching, film, or something else, their interests and giftings can be used to make the gospel visible to friends, neighbors, and guests. Help them find areas where they can grow in skill and put their abilities to use for others. Enable the building of close friendships within your local church and Christian community, and help them sustain those friendships even after moving away.

BABYSITTING

Within OCF small group and Bible study contexts, it is helpful to have a babysitting network. Parents can drop kids off at a common house where focused babysitting can take place. If the little ones come to a group gathering, one idea is for the oldest children of the families to care for the younger ones or for the babysitter to be present in the host home. Be generous by collecting money from the parents to pay the babysitter or babysitting children. They are doing you a valuable service, and you want them to come back. Once your children are past babysitting age, try including them in your OCF gathering. Experiment with ways to connect your entire family in the mission that the Lord has for you. PDO is a helpful method to refine your ever-changing processes. Keep praying for your children to catch a vision for lifetime service.

FAITH AND PARTICIPATION

21: OCF Membership

IN THIS CHAPTER

While it is best to speak of OCF as being a body made up of members (regular, associate, honorary) who are all committed to OCF's Purpose (to glorify God by uniting Christian officers for Biblical fellowship and outreach, equipping and encouraging them to minister effectively in the military society), it is essential to highlight the role regular members have to determine the direction of our ministry by voting for Council Members, as well as for any changes to the OCF Constitution. Every member of OCF has signed the Statement of Participation (to participate actively and prayerfully in the ministry of OCF with my time, talents, spiritual gifts, and financial resources). This chapter address the question of why OCF is focused on commissioned military leaders to accomplish the primary laity work of leading for the good of the entire military community, allowing us to have a small staff to equip, encourage, connect, and send OCFers into various areas of service.

THOSE WHO COMMIT TO PARTICIPATE

The emphasis of OCF, as implied by its name, is to focus on the faithful Christian stewardship of military officers and officer candidates in their leadership roles. Officers (commissioned, Warrant, officer candidates) serving, or those who have served, are the regular members of OCF that guide the ministry by voting for constitutional changes and for our governing council members. These voting roles keep OCF governed and financially focused on the reason OCF exists within the parachurch ministry space. We are a member-led ministry stewarding limited resources (time, energy, money, facilities, staffing, etc.) with an intentional focus on those leaders who are to have a positive Christ-like impact on the larger military population.

We see every person as an image-bearer of God and thus of inestimable value. No one person has greater importance because they fill a particular military role. Non-officers join OCF as associate members, subscribing to

our Purpose as well as our Statements of Faith and Participation the same as regular members. Thus, every OCF member is committed to the same Purpose Statement. We exist for the good of the entire military society. Joining OCF makes one a member, so we simply refer to Regular and Associate members as “OCF members.”

STATEMENT OF PARTICIPATION (affirmed by every member upon joining OCF)

I am committed to the purpose of OCF: To glorify God by uniting Christian officers for Biblical fellowship and outreach, equipping and encouraging them to minister effectively in the military society. As an expression of my commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ and to His work in the military society, I will participate actively and prayerfully in the ministry of OCF with my time, talents, spiritual gifts, and financial resources. I further commit, by God’s grace, to live my life as an example consistent with Biblical guidelines.

ONE BODY

Our name, Officers’ Christian Fellowship, does not indicate a separatist or elitist group. We are a ministry body made up of enlisted, officers, and civilians who are a part of Christ’s body—brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, and all eternal co-heirs in Christ. May the Holy Spirit make us more like Christ in our relationships with those we touch and work among!

Christ’s body is present wherever our members gather for fellowship, Bible study, and prayer. This body is led by volunteers in the field, most of whom have not received seminary-type training. OCF’s work is usually facilitated by non-chaplain, non-OCF staff, and non-clergy individuals. This lay member-led work comes with the risk of someone in the field having a bad experience with OCF. However, with a very small staff, we get to trust that God oversees the study of His Scriptures, that He hears the prayers of His saints, and that He will feed His sheep.

WHY OFFICER FOCUS

OCF exists to focus on a small part of the military ministry work being done by the church around the world. Our focus is on the commissioned leaders responsible for the professional, physical, emotional, and spiritual health and growth of subordinates. We challenge these officers to take up the mantle of spiritual leadership and minister effectively

in the military society. God uses flawed men and women of clay to influence a culture through the words, witness, and example of these leaders, “to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us” (2 Corinthians 4:7). God has given governing authority to some who will give an account for how they served others, used their influence for good, were voices for what is right, and advocated for those who stood unjustly accused (Romans 13:1-8; Acts 10:24-45).

OCF members minister at the intersection of the military community and their identity in Christ as a part of His body. They have the unique ability to mentor and help one another within this military context. Christian leaders build small communities by being able to talk to brothers and sisters who understand their context, responsibilities, language, customs, and courtesies.

SERVE FROM WITHIN

The key concept of OCF’s model is to help develop and connect effective leaders who live, work, and minister within the military community. We do not want members who are dependent on OCF staff for leading and hosting local fellowships. This member-led concept should exist anywhere OCF members live, work, go TDY/TAD, and deploy. To support OCF members, we have OCF staff. Staff enable face-to-face connections, they cast vision for outreach and mentoring, and they help local fellowships get established. We pray that wherever OCF lay leaders sit in academic environments, drink coffee, eat meals, strap into aircraft, fire weapons, or stand on the bridge, there will be a life-giving aroma because of the faith of even one officer who believes in the living Son of God sitting at the right hand of God. Where this one officer exists, there exists the potential for a leader who will also lead local fellowship, Bible study, prayer, and other means of Christian witness.

OCF’s impact goes beyond the workspace because it is also felt in the places we live, shop, and play. Since spouses and children are right alongside the one in uniform, our leaders need to pray for the wisdom to know how to employ all parts of their “family team” during the years they are serving in uniform. “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:9). May your local OCF fellowship reflect the larger body which God has joined us to through Christ.

22: Local Church Membership

IN THIS CHAPTER

OCF members serve where the local church does not have access or the opportunity to impact lives, but where military members can. OCF gathers Christian believers together so that the gospel, and the impacts of the gospel, might go into places where their military credentials permit access to garrison installations, to deployed locations, and to the many temporary locations where the military is sent. A spiritually healthy OCF member is one who lives under the sound teaching and oversight of a local church body. These local churches have the privilege of teaching, training, and sending gospel-bearing members out as ambassadors for Christ.

PARACHURCH COMES ALONGSIDE

A parachurch ministry like OCF needs its members to be part of a visible church, so if your church has membership, then we want you to be a member of a church so that you can be under its oversight. We cannot be “para” church (meaning an organization working alongside the visible church) unless there is a church body to which OCF members are connected. “We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13). Our parachurch ministry should come alongside and bless the visible church of Jesus Christ by tackling a limited part of the work a local church body may not be able to do.

OCF works to grow and build up the Christian worker for places where access is restricted to those who have identification cards to pass through guarded entrance gates and into professional spaces, including overseas locations and combat zones. These are the places where military members with Common Access Cards (CAC) have access to the lives of fellow military personnel. Uniformed OCF members go on temporary duty (TDY/TAD) with them, deploy with them, and live among them. Since chapel participation is covered in a separate chapter, here we focus on the local church—either one where you currently live, or where you remain a member during military service.

The local church has the privilege of faithfully preaching the whole counsel of God's Word, handling baptism and the Lord's supper properly, and being responsible for the spiritual care and oversight of members. While there are some local churches that operate more like a chapel program because there is no opportunity to join and become a member of that church, most probably have a membership class that explains how that church will care for and oversee its members. The members of OCF (usually the laity), along with members of the chaplaincy (the ordained clergy), are an extension of a church that essentially has sent them to do good work in the military. These churches would love to have healthy church members return to them after having grown and matured during their years in uniform. It would be a significant loss to Christ's church body if members of that body joined the military and became crushed by isolation from the larger Christian body, or if they pursued the idolatry of promotion and career success. OCF fellowships challenge one another to stay faithful to our one Lord even as we are united to His one body.

BE A CHURCH MEMBER

It is important to the health of OCF's ministry that we have leaders who are members of Christ-proclaiming, gospel-driven churches. Our leaders need to have a place where they sit under the preaching of the Word every week, where they are known and encouraged toward obedience, and where they have leaders over them who have a responsibility for the care of their souls (Hebrews 13:17). If an individual is not regularly fed by God's Word and has no spiritual oversight and discipline, then there is a risk that one can become convinced of one's own capabilities, operating without help from others. We can become blind to our own weaknesses and self-righteousness, possibly becoming a spiritual liability within the OCF body, within our family, and to ourselves. So we say again, please join with Christ's body in regular worship.

Active-duty military members who move every couple of years will miss out on the opportunity to learn long endurance in a local church that requires them to work through conflict resolution. We can often leave personality challenges or relationship problems simply by moving to the next assignment. After settling down in one place, however, we ought to persevere with our local church through the normal challenges of living with other men and women who themselves are growing in personal spiritual journeys alongside us. We need oversight that helps us stay true to our Christian faith. This Biblical oversight can help us start well,

stay well, and finish strong in the race marked out for us. Much grace is required of the one to whom much grace has been shown. Much love is required of the one to whom much love has been shown (Matthew 18:33; Luke 7:44-47).

ACTIVE IN CHURCH AND IN OCF

It is challenging for OCF members to know how to participate fully in their local church while simultaneously leading and participating in OCF activities, so here are some thoughts:

- Don't minimize the challenge. It is tough to do both, but growth happens when we press beyond our own abilities and resources. If the Holy Spirit is convicting you to host/be part of an OCF group, then obey that call.
- Share OCF's ministry focus with your church leadership early on—cast a vision for OCF's military ministry. Talk about the unique opportunities OCF equips you for, grows you in, and sends you to do. We rejoice when the local church sees itself as your sending body. Maybe the church will “recognize” your OCF group as part of their military outreach or as the small group they want you to be part of.
- Bring TDY/TAD guests to church with you, not allowing new arrivals to languish in a hotel room alone.
- See if your church can develop a fast-track method for military membership so these folks can get involved and volunteer or serve within the church soon after arrival. Maybe a letter of introduction from the last church they worshiped with will help with this.
- Help your church use the right words to welcome the military through online visibility. Encourage them to greet new people at services and find ways to help deployed individuals and families.
- Help set up volunteer teams to assist PCS transitions (moving boxes, watching children, providing food, or helping clean). They also need you to help them understand TDY/TAD and deployment times and how they can support you (and your family) during absences.
- Ask your church to support you by encouraging your outreach within the military community, supporting Christian fellowship in your workplace, and by following up with you after you move away

from the area. Ask them to call/text/email you and make sure your feet are firmly planted back in a solid church and OCF fellowship at the new location. These simple steps may help you do what you know you ought to do.

- Most importantly, help the local church see their positive impact on the lives of military personnel. The church should see that they are sending out laborers into the military mission field. Help your local church understand the way they are equipping you through the preaching of God's Word, through church family relationships, and through caring oversight.

23: Member Roles Within OCF

IN THIS CHAPTER

There are three main roles an OCF member can volunteer to fill and become visible in the OCF Directory. These volunteer roles are OCF Local Leader, OCF Contact, and OCF Hospitality Home. The OCF Directory also makes OCF Coordinators visible. If someone desires to support a larger area, region, or military specialty as a Coordinator, please contact the OCF Home Office at (800) 424-1984. Finally, our OCF Council members are volunteers who serve on the OCF Council after being elected to this role.

Local Leader

The Local Leader of an OCF fellowship will start, sustain, and hand off the baton of leadership for a specific OCF fellowship body. Our Local Leaders should seek to live faithfully before the face of God using all of Scripture as the guide, using passages such as Titus 1:6-9; 2:2-8 for specific insight. Here are the key tasks of a Local Leader who gladly responds to this Spirit-given opportunity:

1. Lead a military community gathering for the study of Scripture and to join in prayer. Coordinate who will lead the Bible study, but also consider who can organize childcare, food, music, social activities, etc. Advocate the use of OCF's Pray-Discover-Obey process, asking God for wisdom as you seek the input, counsel, and advice of fellow participants. Be sure to share the workload according to the various giftings of those within the local body. Remember Paul's words in Romans 12:7-8 about using our gifts: "if service, in ... serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness." Persevere through the "obey" phase of PDO, encouraging everyone to meet regularly and consistently.
2. Stay in communication with local participants (message, email, voice, personal visit, mail). Build relationships.
3. Welcome new arrivals, TDY/TAD personnel, and those who have just discovered that a ministry like OCF exists.

4. Build relationships with the chaplain(s) and the chaplain team.
5. Communicate with the OCF Home Office by sharing prayer requests, moves, rank changes, etc.
6. Notify the Member Care team when an OCF Directory update is needed by filling out a new List Me form online at ocfusa.org/list-me.
7. Promote events and conferences of the larger OCF, especially retreats and gatherings at OCF's White Sulphur Springs (Pennsylvania) and Spring Canyon (Colorado) Conference Centers.
8. Develop an understanding of why OCF has membership, then help others think through and pray about joining OCF. Learn how OCF funds its various ministries and maintains financial integrity. Encourage the local body to participate in military ministry by worshipfully sharing a portion of their monthly offerings with OCF.
9. Help connect TDY/TAD, deploying, and PCSing personnel to OCF Local Leaders, Contacts, and Hospitality Homes.
10. Pray for, and act on, the opportunity to develop the next Local Leader, ensuring a handoff when you depart.

Contact

OCF Contacts are visible in the Directory when members don't have a military community nearby, when they are not able to devote time and energy to local leadership, or when they are seeking to start a new local fellowship that hasn't begun meeting yet. Here are some key tasks of an OCF Contact:

1. Welcome transiting personnel, new arrivals, or those just finding out about OCF. Invite others to pray with you about starting a local Bible study and fellowship group (at which point you would be listed as a Local Leader).
2. Build relationships with the chaplain(s) and the chaplain team.
3. Become an expert on the local area so that you can help OCF members get settled and feel welcome.

4. Communicate with the OCF Home Office by sharing prayer requests, directory updates, rank changes, etc.
5. Join in OCF conferences and retreats, especially those at White Sulphur Springs and Spring Canyon.

Hospitality Home

You are the one who opens your home, and thus your lives, to strangers. We used to call this the OCF B&B Directory, but since we no longer publish a paper copy, the B&B has transitioned to this new listing. Some key things that OCF Hospitality Homes provide:

1. A bed and/or fellowship over a meal for those who are passing through, visiting, or moving into the area.
2. The opportunity for others to see Christian love in action—each of you has various giftings, and you don't have to have a perfect home to welcome strangers in ... you need the Holy Spirit dwelling within you!
3. Boundaries. Know what is acceptable to you and communicate clearly if your conscience or home will be strained or harmed by your guests. Be gracious but share honestly.
4. Send your guests out by praying for them and offering a coffee for the road. If appropriate, stay in touch.

Coordinator

This role is meant to bless OCF members, Local Leaders, and Contacts by coordinating OCF's work within an area, region, country, military specialty, etc. Our Coordinators are the synchronizers, encouragers, helpers, and primary focal point for communication between OCF staff and the membership they are helping to keep connected. Coordinators are a significant part of OCF's touch as they develop relationships among OCF laborers in the field. Some coordinators will engage ROTC officer candidates to connect the largest commissioning source with a vision for Christian service, fellowship, and resources. Coordinators can expect to:

1. Get to know the Local Leaders and Contacts, praying for them regularly, growing in friendship.

2. Find out how the different leaders and groups are doing. Visit local fellowships, cadets, and midshipmen to put a face and personality with a name, and to encourage them in their current calling.
3. Ensure the OCF Directory accurately reflects the fellowship picture in the area, region, or country.
4. Help ensure that OCF communication, announcements, and materials get to the volunteers in the field.
5. Invite members of the local OCF body to join you at an OCF conference center for a retreat or other event.
6. Be the communication point for the OCF Home Office and with the Director of Field Engagement. Notify OCF staff when there is potential harm to the OCF body resulting from an individual's action, group issues, a change in military policy, or similar concern.
7. Handle linkups that come from the Home Office, making sure new arrivals get a personal welcome.
8. Initiate hand-offs for departing members, ensuring that the gaining OCF body knows they have someone coming their way.
9. In some cases, the Coordinator will plan, spend, and document expenses for special events.
10. When able, visit chaplain programs and appropriate military installation leaders where an OCF Memorandum has been executed. Help us be seen as a valuable non-profit organization.
11. Tell your primary OCF staff connection when there is too much to do ... we want to enable lifelong service in the field and avoid burnout or weariness simply because we did not realize help was needed.

Council Member

OCF's governing board is called the OCF Council, and it is made up of regular members of the OCF. They keep OCF spiritually faithful by staying anchored in the Scriptures, they pray for and strive to keep ministry integrity, they govern using the PDO process, they hire and oversee the Executive Director, they govern strategically, and they hold fiduciary responsibility for OCF.

Here are some more facts about the OCF Council:

1. There are between 6 and 22 members on the OCF Council with terms beginning June 1. The term of service for a Council member is three years.
2. One third of the Council is elected annually.
3. Regular members may be nominated for OCF Council service. Candidates must be nominated by three regular members and complete an application package.

24: OCF Volunteers Who Participate

IN THIS CHAPTER

The various seasons of life bring about different abilities and capacities to volunteer within OCF and within your local church. This chapter gives ideas for some of the many ways you can volunteer to serve the military community and OCF by using your gifts, time, talent, and treasure.

TIME, TALENTS, GIFTS, RESOURCES

When you became a member of OCF, you signed (either by hand or digitally) our Statement of Participation, in which you said you support the purpose of OCF and would “participate actively and prayerfully in the ministry of OCF with my time, talents, spiritual gifts, and financial resources.” Amen, thank you! Participation helps keep what God says through Peter in mind, “The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace ...” (1 Peter 4:7-10).

Whether you have been an OCF member for a week or for several decades, there is always room for you to volunteer using your various skills and to host whomever God brings your way. Paul said, “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:1-2). Your willingness to be a steward leader means that you try to reach out with a warm welcome to new arrivals, that you invite guests to your home for a meal, or that maybe you loan your car to someone who needs a way to get to church or Bible study when you cannot pick them up. Your desire that men and women know Christ as Lord, enjoy the study of Scripture, and mature in faith is made visible by every expression of your care for others.

SEASONS OF LIFE AND CAPACITY

Local Leaders fill the most critical role for a healthy OCF fellowship to become established and to thrive. Local Leaders give of their time,

energy, and gifts at the local level. They initiate regular Pray-Discover-Obey gatherings, and they have the local body on their mind throughout the week. Since they know God controls any “success,” they organize, coordinate, push, and prod, and yet they rest in Christ for the outcome. Local Leaders sometimes have tough days when no one shows up for Bible study, or they go through spiritual dry spells and hard times. These trials help Local Leaders develop a deep understanding that the success of the ministry is dependent on God and not on them. The leader serves the body by getting men, women, and children together to pray, study the Bible, enjoy meals, play, and have adventures together. *(See “OCF Roles” chapter for more details.)*

In some seasons of life and at certain assignments, it is not possible to be a Local Leader. Busy and tough seasons are real, as are times when you are unable to organize and stir up a local OCF fellowship. If that is the case, then you may be willing to be visible in the OCF Directory as an OCF Contact. The OCF Contact role can become a transition role if God brings another like-minded person into the local area. We love having OCF Contacts around the world so that no person is left alone in a hotel room without an opportunity to be invited to coffee, a meal, to church, or some other event. *(See “OCF Roles” chapter for more details.)*

The people who act as the glue, the encouragers, and the helpers to Local Leaders and Contacts are called Coordinators. Our ministry avoids establishing rigid hierarchical relationships, because we are a volunteer organization. It is wonderful when members have fellow laborers who will give help, encouragement, and accountability, since every hand, foot, eye, nose, and ear are needed, each one of us filling a role made possible by our heavenly Father. *(See the “OCF Roles” section of this handbook for ways to pass on what God has taught you.)*

VOLUNTEERS IN MANY PLACES

There are other ways for you to grow as an OCF participant—give us a call at (800) 424-1984 to talk about options. Here are a few thoughts about how to use your gifts and abilities to grow the OCF fellowship:

1. OCF staff often require technology, social media, web design, editing, and database help.
2. OCF Conference Centers need maintenance, cleaning, mechanical, and physical labor help.

3. Outdoor programs at our two conference centers require volunteer mentors and supervisors.

4. ROTC, OCS/OTS, and Academy cadets and midshipmen need mentors and coaches for encouragement and growth in spiritual wisdom. You may be able to do this virtually.

5. New officers and new believers need Christian mentors willing to meet with them regularly.

6. Traveling OCF members are blessed by Hospitality Homes where they find a bed and/or food.

25: OCF Conference Centers

IN THIS CHAPTER

OCF owns two conference centers (Spring Canyon in Colorado and White Sulphur Springs in Pennsylvania) for the purpose of bringing all the military community of singles, families, and friends together for mutual growth, edification, rest, and refreshment. Guests should leave the conference centers ready to re-enter the mission field where they live. These conference centers function as home base for many military families, the one place the family visits year after year from pre-commissioning years all the way through post-service years, coming back with children and grandchildren. The centers provide OCF members a depot for spiritual maintenance, a crossroads environment to meet members of the larger family of Christ, and a place where vision is developed to serve for the rest of life.

EQUIPPING TO SERVE

Thousands of OCF members have enjoyed the thrill of outdoor settings, of deep Christian fellowship around blazing fires, of quiet moments with hot drinks in their hands, and of solid teaching from Scripture—all while attending programs, conferences, and retreats at OCF’s conference centers. Once you have attended an OCF conference center, you will understand why they both have become a “home away from home” for many. These are the places we want to return to again and again. Each visit is essentially a Christ-family reunion, even for those who have not previously met! When the OCF family gets together it is great to hug, visit with, and get to know brothers and sisters who are in the Army, Air Force, Coast Guard, Marines, Navy, and Space Force. The OCF family is always “Joint.”

Local Leaders of OCF fellowships are the front-line advocates for bringing singles, couples, and families to join them at a conference center. The best invitation comes by saying, “Join me at White Sulphur Springs/Spring Canyon!” Both centers exist to teach, encourage, refresh, heal, and send out military members for the purpose of making the

gospel of Jesus Christ visible and transformative in the lives of those they serve among. They provide speakers, teachers, mentors, guides, staff, and volunteers to serve the guests. The centers were established near cadet and midshipman populations, but they are much more than high-adventure locations for single young men and women—they run programs to impact and serve the entire age spectrum from infants to youth to adults.

NURTURING THE FAMILY

Our conference centers offer activities for children and for adults, providing age-appropriate programs for children while the adults are in separate sessions. Throughout the year we have weekend or week-long programs to develop parent-child relationships in special settings. Take a look at these opportunities—as well as the other programs that the conference centers provide—for ways to connect with and bless your family. In the summer, your high school-aged children can apply to become volunteers for service at either conference center. This gives youth an opportunity to serve on conference center staff while enjoying the larger military family.

Both conference centers offer one-year intern programs (for 18- to 24-year-olds) that combine academics and spiritual growth with the opportunity to gain vocational experience as a staff member. The WSS EXSEL Discipleship Program partners with Liberty University for college credits. EXSEL exists to provide a Christ-centered discipleship experience integrating spiritual growth, vocational experience, and educational opportunities for those who desire to pursue God through lives of servant leadership in their future vocational callings. Spring Canyon PEAK Interns assist in accomplishing the Spring Canyon mission while honing life skills and participating in academic discussions designed to promote ownership of beliefs, decisions, and actions.

Guests often comment on how a visit to one of the conference centers was instrumental in sustaining or rebuilding relationships. Many say that their favorite part of waking up at a center was knowing that they did not have to cook or clean all day! Come join us at a conference center and bring a friend/family along with you.

SPRING CANYON CONFERENCE CENTER

26000 County Rd 344, Buena Vista, CO 81211
springcanyon.org | (719) 395-2328 or (888) 663-1417

Spring Canyon is OCF's Colorado conference center, located amid the Collegiate Peaks, two hours west of Colorado Springs. This location provides a convenient retreat and conference location for United States Air Force Academy and ROTC cadets/midshipmen, as well as for service members stationed near the Rocky Mountains. Guests experience a log cabin conference center that has one large meeting room, classrooms for children, and a state-of-the-art kitchen for serving guests in a spacious dining room. Lodging at Spring Canyon varies from small cabins to larger chalets and even larger lodges. Our newest lodges have central fellowship areas and private rooms with bunk beds and either a queen- or king-bed in every room.

Spring Canyon activities gather singles, couples, and children together to hear Scripture taught by a guest speaker, to share fellowship and encouragement around meals and extra activities, and to have plenty of quiet and rest in a majestic setting. Every year there are week-long Summer Celebrations, multi-day Winter Sports Retreats, a fall Aspentime Retreat, individual OCF group retreats, and multiple ROTC and USAF Academy retreats. There are special programs to connect parents with children (Father Teen Adventure, Climb Together), while other programs focus on topics such as homeschooling, women's ministry, or transitions out of the military. OCF members can contact the Spring Canyon office at any time to inquire about individual getaways.

Finally, Spring Canyon hosts Rocky Mountain High (RMH), a junior officer and officer candidate high adventure outdoor program. RMH helps develop the future leaders of OCF and the military by connecting junior officers, cadets, and midshipmen with senior mentors. Mentors help campers wrestle with how to live an integrated Christian life within the military and for the rest of their lives. Program elements of RMH include whitewater rafting, rappelling, rock climbing, and a multi-day backpacking trek.

WHITE SULPHUR SPRINGS CONFERENCE CENTER

4500 Milligans Cove Rd, Manns Choice, PA 15550
whitesulphursprings.org | (814) 623-5583

White Sulphur Springs is OCF's Pennsylvania based facility providing teaching, refreshment, and encouragement to OCF members, families, and friends. Cadets, Midshipmen, and military members stationed east of the Mississippi River can drive to this beautiful property. Our modern hotel, Heritage House, and our historic 1884 hotel, Harrison House, are nestled among the hills and trees of the Allegheny Mountains, complemented by 1,100 acres for hiking, horse facilities, high and low ropes courses, several ponds for swimming, canoeing, or skating, a disc golf course, zip line, and more. The White Sulphur Springs triathlon requires no training, since guests who participate simply complete the "race's three legs": rocking on the porches, eating amazing meals, and then enjoying rejuvenating sleep in a bed away from the stress and responsibilities of daily life.

Several generations of youth have graduated from the week-long Allegheny Outback! (AO! is for high school) and Camp Caleb (3rd-8th grade) summer camp programs. These programs are so popular that capacity has been increased through the years to try and shorten waiting lists and be able to welcome more children and families to WSS. During the fall and spring there are parent-child connection Adventure Weekends with specific adventure themes such as Horse, Canoe, and Rappel Adventures. Because WSS is close to the National Capital Region, many members make weekend trips to WSS, and churches with military connections use the property for retreats and getaways.

The annual White Sulphur Springs conference rhythm includes multiple Summer R&R sessions, as well as Winter Retreats over the Christmas and New Year's holidays. Singles, couples, and families experience great speakers, kid's programs, and refreshing times with the Lord and with one another. Other recurring ministry events include a Valentines Getaway marriage retreat, a Resurrection Retreat, workshops for members transitioning out of the military, a uniformed women retreat, and several ROTC and academy retreat weekends. There are always volunteer opportunities for those who love to put their hands to various maintenance and cleaning tasks. WSS welcomes guests to come individually or with friends whenever there is room for them to have a B&B-style hotel stay, to enjoy camping or the use of a rustic cabin, or to show off the property that God has blessed us with.

26: Special Events, Conferences, Retreats

IN THIS CHAPTER

OCF members plan and host many different gatherings for the benefit of the military community around them. There is no limit to the creativity involved in these gatherings, but each one requires an initiator, an organizer, and help from the larger fellowship to execute the gathering. These are usually exciting opportunities to meet the larger OCF body, to be encouraged in your walk, and to gain new vision for service.

LOCALLY ORGANIZED, HOME GROWN

Local events and retreats are opportunities to be encouraged spiritually, professionally, and relationally, and they are usually opportunities to cross paths with men and women from other branches of the military. OCF members attending special events around the world can join with others who are serving, who have served, and even some who will serve later, and military ministry events tend to form life-long bonds among participants. In some countries and regions, there are resources from children and youth parachurch ministries to provide programming for children, but in smaller areas, the adults and teenagers might take turns keeping younger ones busy, fed, and safe. Our hope is that OCF leaders and volunteers who love to organize will be in the forefront of putting together outings for others. It is up to the local leaders to Pray-Discover-Obey their way through the process of deciding location, timing, fees, lodging, child programs, food, etc. One area hosted an annual multi-day Thanksgiving Conference organized by in-country volunteers. In other areas/regions there have been annual one-day picnics or ice cream socials for many years.

These fun outings take time, energy, funds, and preparation, but they bless and refresh many people, even helping men and women stay in uniform after years of fatigue. Simple local retreats can be planned around a state or national park campground, so that organizers do not have to locate a hotel or conference center to meet in. Campfires and hikes are a go-to favorite for many ages, but not for all people. Some

groups plan a service project around a mini-retreat environment by having a speaker in the evenings after serving in a community during the day. If the service project is for an organization that provides lodging and food, then you have a mini event well on the way toward success. Special gatherings will connect OCF leaders with peers, with more senior leaders, and with the entire military society. In other words, they allow us to join together in community and connect with people with whom we might not otherwise spend much time.

HOME OFFICE HELP

The OCF Home Office can help with event and retreat planning by joining in prayer during the PDO, giving planning advice, helping you find other OCF members in the area so you can reach out to others more broadly, advertising the event in official OCF communications, and helping find speakers that will be right for the group. Please give us the opportunity to get excited with you about what you are doing! You are the experts in the field who know your military family—whether midshipmen, cadets, mid-career families, or retirees—and we want all of them to catch (or be reminded of) the importance of spending and being spent for the souls of others (2 Corinthians 12:15).

27: For a Lifetime

IN THIS CHAPTER

We hope your OCF participation will extend beyond the few years one spends in uniformed service. We are constantly seeking to connect men and women serving, and who have served, for the rest of their lives according to their gifts and capacities. Once you have connected and met one another, we want you to keep getting together to help stir one another toward effective stewardship to the end of your days.

SEPARATED OR RETIRED

As a member of OCF, you can participate in this family and fellowship of believers for the rest of your life. When you step away from military service, be sure to ask God where you can impact military lives during your next career or phase of life. Our hope is that for most who have worn the uniform and joined OCF, our member-led ministry will become a lifetime commitment (this may not mean working only within OCF circles). OCF members belong to God, they are citizens of His kingdom, and adopted children of His family. As a small expression of that family, OCF develops and grows our members so they never stop participating as servants in the church of our Lord Jesus. May you be found participating as a member of your local church, but also as a participant in military ministry wherever you live. You have understanding, skills, language, and stories you can pass on. You can finish strong like Caleb, who said, “And now, behold, the Lord has kept me alive, ... I am this day eighty-five years old. I am still as strong today as I was in the day that Moses sent me; my strength now is as my strength was then, for war and for going and coming” (Joshua 14:10-11).

MEMBER-TO-MEMBER RELATIONSHIPS

Most people who separate or retire from the military will end up living within driving distance of an ROTC or military service location. If you land near a university with an ROTC unit, pray to see if God would have you invest in the next generation of military leaders there. Consider this work regardless of your service background or the service of the ROTC unit. ROTC fellowship, led by OCF men and women who have worn the

uniform, can be their connection to active-duty thinking, preparing cadets and midshipmen to join the ministry of OCF when they hit active duty or lead within guard and reserve units. Christian students long to have mentors who know what it was like to wear the uniform; they want to hear “war stories” of living lives of integrity; and many of them did not grow up studying Scripture. Show them how to do that ... and tell stories.

There are some rural areas that make a drive to a military population unreasonable, but in those cases, we can use technology to enable members to mentor other members still in uniform. For a specific case, consider that women in uniform desire to connect with other women who have worn the uniform and will understand some of their situations. Since they cannot always find a similarly minded Christian woman nearby, Christian female veterans can be a blessing even over long-distance. Women can visit the OCF website to look for special events and retreats for women throughout the year.

THE UNIFORMED SERVING YEARS

If you came to faith in Christ after already beginning your time in the military, there is no better time than today to consider how you will spend your remaining years of service. God has so designed you that you are in the right place to impact the military community for the good of others and for the glory of God. Study Scripture to gain insight about why God created male and female and how the commands He gave them to be fruitful, to multiply, to subdue, and to exercise dominion (Genesis 1:28) might inform your sustained service under authority. Study what God says is true about governing authorities in Romans 13, because every authority is from Him. The Bible puts your service in context. Seek out a mentor who has been in the Christian walk longer than you and who can help you draft a mission or vision statement. If you are married, get your family involved to help you think about why God has you and your household in the military.

WHAT “LIFETIME” MEANS TODAY

You can take practical steps to think about what “OCF for a Lifetime” means to you. Start with prayer, write down your thoughts, and then reread the agreement you made when joining OCF (our Statement of Faith and of Participation). The Statement of Participation says in part,

“As an expression of my commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ and to His work in the military society, I will participate actively and

prayerfully in the ministry of OCF with my time, talents, spiritual gifts, and financial resources.”

This expression takes different forms at various phases of life, but since we have agreed to participate actively and prayerfully, the first thing we realize is that it will take time. Ministry requires engaged members who use their giftings and are committed to giving up part of their “free time.” At one period of life, your active participation might mean you are personally facilitating a local Bible study by using your gift of administration or teaching while financially supporting OCF. At other times, you might continue as a financial supporter, praying for OCF’s work, but your talents and gifts are used as a volunteer at one of our conference centers. As the years progress, you may once again have the time, access, or resources to start hosting a fellowship again. Since we rely on member-led ministry work, then every member is critical to engage the lives of those serving in uniform.

We do well to mimic Paul’s end-of-life charge to his son Timothy. “***I charge you*** in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: ***preach the Word; be ready*** in season and out of season; ***reprove, rebuke, and exhort***, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. ***As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry***” (2 Timothy 4:1-5, emphasis added).

CRITICAL THINKING

28: Worldview

IN THIS CHAPTER

Worldview informs our priorities, which then determine our use of time. Our understanding of creation, fall, redemption, and living under Christ's new covenant impacts how we live our lives, prioritize our use of resources, and engage the people around us. If we think deeply now (while we have time for study and contemplation), then it is more likely we will be a leader who acts decisively during times of crisis or stress.

CREATION AND YOUR PLACE IN IT

If Christ is Lord of all, then He is the Lord of everything we think, do, and say—every bit of our life and every choice we make. Are you one who operates from a Christian worldview by allowing the Bible to develop your understanding of the universe and our place in it? By trusting what the Bible says about how the universe came into being and why the world has brokenness, when you study it to discover what is true and what is good, and when you hold fast in hope because of God's coming judgment with a new heaven and a new earth, your worldview is a distinctly Christian one. Christians have confidence that justice will prevail because God is good, He rules over all things, and He will make all things right even as He judges His enemies.

HABITUAL THINKING FOR CRISES

The leaders of OCF are committed to the proposition that Christ's lordship extends to our every thought, word, and deed. OCF, and every ministry, is valuable to the extent we spur others to live Coram Deo (before the face of God). Everything in this Handbook is written with the hope that you will adopt a thoroughly Christian worldview and that every choice you make will draw you and others to greater holiness through greater love for God and your fellow man. This worldview develops naturally as Christian leaders learn from the Bible the history of God's work in the creation, fall, and redemption. The Bible teaches that what God says is good, and it shows how God is keeping all the promises He has made. Daily decisions anchored in a Biblical worldview become second nature as the Christian leader studies to become more

and more saturated in Biblical thinking. When faced with ethical and moral decisions during crisis moments, military professionals make decisions that are the result of past habitual Christian thinking. At non-crisis moments, there may be the opportunity to weigh decisions using careful study, prayer, counsel, course of action analysis, etc. We trust that God rules over the affairs of mankind, and we know there will be an accounting for what we do in this life. Each of us has a limited amount of time given us by God to do good work and not be idle (1 Thessalonians 2:1-12).

UNDERSTAND THE TIMES

Since the Bible is God’s Word inspired by the Holy Spirit, we should expect our observations of everyday life, known historical facts, scientific methods, and the experiences of people across cultures and time to line up with what Scripture reveals. While the Bible proves itself true again and again, there are occasions when we are perplexed and don’t understand how to align our observations with Scripture. When this happens, you can still trust God’s Word, asking Him to increase your understanding as you seek answers. Keep growing by reading excellent books, studying apologetics of the faith, talking to mentors, and learning to think deeply about the narrative God reveals in the pages of Scripture. The chiefs of Issachar had an “understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do ...” (1 Chronicles 12:32) as they led their kinsmen. May you also know how to lead with an understanding of the changing times.

Paul spent weeks, months, and years at a time away from home while serving Christ’s church. He wrote to the Thessalonians that, in addition to the gospel of God, he was ready to give his very self to them (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8), and to the Corinthians he said that he would gladly spend and be spent for their souls (2 Corinthians 12:15). Similar to Paul’s affection for the Thessalonians (like a mother for her child) after a very short stay with them, we can expect military ministry to grow our love for others. We will increasingly learn to be ready to give our lives and to spend resources and energy so that Christ is made visible where we serve. The two passages mentioned above mean that we not only share the good news of God the Son becoming flesh, taking our sin, and rising from the dead, but they also mean that we are “all in”—everything committed for the sake of the souls of the military community serving alongside and around us.

THE VALUE OF EVERY PERSON

We see every person in the community as image bearers of God (all have dignity, value, worth), and because we have been forgiven much by God, He expects us to love much (Luke 7:47). We forgive as we have been forgiven (Matthew 6:12). “Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person” (Colossians 4:5-6). Every person is born with the corruption of sin upon them, yet we all inhabit exactly the body God chose to give us and that He calls us to glorify Him with. We are to patiently bear the quirks and shortcomings of other people since we also have persistent sin (brokenness) that is still being put to death. We do our best to add, improve, beautify, and lead with the expectation that future generations will be blessed by our work. In fact, we value all work, not thinking that certain types of work are more important than others. We are to, “aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one” (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12).

WALK WISELY

We are under authority, and in authority, as we exercise leadership. Military leadership is an extension of the authorities God has established within our nation. Our lives should be more and more consistently obedient to God’s commands in all that we think, say, and do. “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15-16). This integrated living will mature so that how we act in private will more consistently reflect how we act in public. For example, if we have a family, our children can testify whether patience, love, kindness, generosity, etc., exist when others are not watching. What goes on in the car should be able to be said outside the car. This growing sense of living before the face of God prepares us for Christ’s return, when we will give an account of our stewardship to our Lord Jesus Christ. He has given us much, so much is required (Luke 12:48). If we lack this eternal perspective, it is likely our leadership will be self-focused, rather than a blessing to those we desire to serve.

Worldview informs our priorities, and these priorities determine our use of time for the work of ministry within the military society. We know that time is limited, and we can never turn time back for a “do over.” Have you read and considered Jesus’ teaching about counting the

cost and renouncing all we have to be a disciple of Christ (Luke 14:25-33)? Be sober minded about your priorities. Think about why God has called you into military service and influence. Decide ahead of time the few things that will cause you to cancel or not join a regular gathering of military believers in Bible study and fellowship (e.g., sickness, military exercise, bad weather). These reasons should be few as you prioritize a conviction to gather with the body. Having a prayerful conversation about consistency with others beforehand will guard you from making last-minute excuses. Knowing we will give an account for how we use time and resources (Matthew 24:36-25:46), be sure to have the finish line in sight before you join the race.

29: Professional Calling

IN THIS CHAPTER

Understanding the idea of professional calling flows from our grasp of God's sovereignty over all His creation. The Bible speaks repeatedly of His unfolding plan as He directs the steps of men and women. In light of God's sovereignty and His step-directing work, entire military households can see themselves as living on mission, allowing their love for God and love for neighbor to establish the priorities of the home. Both adults and children are essential members of the Christian military body. May you use your days well!

THE CHRISTIAN LEADER

It is important that you see yourself as a Christian first and military leader second so that your personal identity remains rooted in Christ (Ephesians 4:1-6). Paul had to confront the Galatian church for “deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and ... turning to a different gospel” (Galatians 1:6-10). They were trying to add works to their Christian identity. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). You desire to obey God's commands? Awesome! Ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom to execute your duties well. Are you known as one who lives with integrity in private and public spheres, living in the confidence that past, present, and future sin is forgiven? Super! Then self-reliance or guilt will not keep you from effective service. Faith in Jesus means that your sin has been transferred to Him, and His righteousness has been transferred to you. Your personal identity is being found in Christ through faith, not in your rank or position. Do you delight in serving your unit, family, and neighbors with the unique gifts you have been given? Again, great! That means you will end the day saying, “we have only done what was our duty” (Luke 17:10).

As you read this chapter, consider whether your first priority is to love God and your second is to love your neighbor in the military community ... whoever that may be on any given day. What can you do for those who live with and around you? Jesus answered the “Who is

my neighbor?” question using the parable of the Samaritan. The young lawyer understood that the one who behaved as a neighbor was “The one who showed him mercy” (Luke 10:37). There are people within the military community who need you to show mercy, to show practical acts of friendship, of professional skill, of giving help, or sharing an eternal perspective.

OCF’s military members grow in an understanding of God’s grace while rubbing elbows within the military community. While no two people will have the same experience, most former military personnel can say that the military experience caused them to mature physically, mentally, and spiritually. Common experiences include going through specialized training, meeting physical fitness and discipline standards, learning communication and leadership skills, and experiencing pressure while under fire or some other type of crisis. Use these uniformed years to bear witness to God’s covenant keeping work for those whom He has adopted, lest the time be wasted due to ambition, careerism, and distractions (Philippians 2:1-7). Because those who belong to Christ are jealous for God’s holy name, they are constantly learning to live lives of obedience to Christ’s commands (Matthew 28:20). This learning is reflected in how they represent the God who redeemed them, is changing them, and is directing their steps for His glory.

GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY

Our vocation is within the sphere of God’s sovereign direction of our steps. While there is mystery in how God accomplishes His purposes (Proverbs 16:9; 19:21), we are confident that He used the variety of decisions that steered the course of our lives toward military service (how you studied, exercised, tested, used your free time, etc.). These individual decisions eventually resulted in your taking an oath before God to support and defend the Constitution of the United States (Exodus 10:20). Alongside the prophets and apostles, we acknowledge that God’s plan includes every part of history and culture (Acts 2:23; 4:25-28). Specialty codes (jobs), assignments, and promotions flow from the gracious oversight of God “and He does according to His will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand or say to Him, ‘What have you done’” (Daniel 4:35)?

Having found ourselves in uniform, we can describe our profession as a calling, a calling to glorify God in how we fulfill our work. He is the Caller; we are the called. We are in the location and workplace God intends to be good for us, good for those we serve, and again ... for

His glory. Peter reasons (1 Peter 2:13-16) that we are to be subject to human institutions (in our case, the military), to do good (submitting to authority and being excellent in work), and to remember that we are servants of God within the culture. The entire New Testament bears witness to God’s call coupled with our responsibility to do good, and if we “do good and suffer for it,” then we must endure, since it is to this that God has called us—Christ leaving us an example (1 Peter 2:20-21). Since Christian suffering and endurance are a regular theme of the New Testament, they are dealt with throughout this Handbook.

Spend time thanking God for sending you into the military. We need His wisdom to live faithfully within this military space, seeking to live “on mission.” Living on mission includes things like praying about housing (where you look for a place to live), where you will join in weekly worship, and whether you will host an OCF fellowship. Your housing decision has the potential to allow you to touch the military community that is assigned with you, or it can separate you from that same community. (This is true even if there is no base housing, since you can try to be near concentrations of military personnel.) Hobbies, travel, pets, post-graduate education, and volunteerism are examples of things that will either develop your opportunity to impact military personnel and dependents or hinder your ability to serve among the military community. Consider developing a short mission statement for yourself or for your family. You might be surprised at how the exercise of thinking through your purpose will change what you do in the future.

USE TIME WELL ... STAY ON MISSION

Your time in military service is a relatively short number of years in relation to the whole of life. None of us can stay in uniform indefinitely, and some of you reading this might not live to the end of a full time of service. Only God knows our days. Do your best to help your family serve with you in the military context, and particularly in light of your hope through faith in Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15). During the uniformed years, you will live and work alongside fellow servants—a subculture of service members who support and defend the Constitution of the United States. We know that not everyone receives desirable duties or assignments, but even “bad” assignments often turn into “great assignments” where you build close-knit relationships and develop life-long friendships. Everyone needs relational community, especially when the days are hard. Comfortable and pleasant assignments risk breeding complacent and lukewarm spiritual laborers, because we can forget why we are serving. Austere, hostile, and challenging environments,

however, can cause us to grow, mature, and depend on God for daily sustenance and confident hope (Hebrews 13:1-16; Romans 12:9-21).

FAMILY ALIGNMENT

If you are married (or have children in the house), pray that God might move the hearts of those in your home to be like-minded with you regarding being on mission, perceiving the special opportunity you all have to serve together. Each member of your home is gifted differently. One person hears and sees life through colors, sounds, and smells; another one may quickly connect with strangers through spending time in conversation; and yet another might enjoy hard work with the neighbors. Children have access into the homes and lives of their friends and their friend's families, and these are places where our youth often express love for others more transparently than adults. Parents may not have this kind of access to homes, but commissaries, exchanges, MWR facilities, playgrounds, medical clinics, and spouse clubs are examples of places where military family members meet and connect. Another example of how military children are unique is that they may become close friends within minutes or hours of meeting one another ... a great example of relational ministry!

You may already be convinced that God has placed you in the military community to glorify Him, and that your professional duties should be infused with your identity in Christ. This conviction should give you increased love for the men, women, and children found among the military community as they see your life lived under the lordship of Christ. Are you serving under authority, submitting wherever appropriate, and living by God's revealed truths? Are you learning more and more to put your faith into practice because you know that those over you, under you, and alongside you benefit from your professional endeavors? If this sounds reasonable to you, then you are an OCF member who is on mission, desiring to know God's will, obeying Him in what you understand. You are seeking the good of the community in which God has placed you, and into which He has sent you. Learning to do this well both within and outside the military community will prepare you for the day when you are no longer in uniform. You can help non-military friends and neighbors better understand those who are within the military. Our work parallels that of God's people in the Old Testament who were sent into exile in Babylon—they were not where they wanted to be, but God still commanded them to live flourishing lives right where He placed them (Jeremiah 29:4-7).

30: Authority, Submission, Ethics, Morality

IN THIS CHAPTER

The military is a great place for uniformed leaders to learn how to submit to God and to those He places over us. Officers usually serve in positions of influence that give them an opportunity to do good to all those around them, whether to Americans, to allies, or to the people of a nation at war with the United States. Sound ethical and moral actions flow from the practice of studying, thinking, and repeatedly doing what is right, especially when under stress. The bottom line is that Christians ought to have a good (positive) influence on a military unit's culture and climate, in times of peace and in times of conflict.

ALL AUTHORITY IS FROM GOD

God declares through the apostle Paul that “there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God” (Romans 13:1). Military leaders not only submit to governing authorities, but they also are a governing authority. God raises up every ruling authority according to His purposes and plans, from local leaders to national leaders. Consider how God dealt with Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, by humbling him until he acknowledged “that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom He will” (Daniel 4:32). According to God's will, Joseph was appointed to great authority by the Pharaoh of Egypt in order to save many lives (Genesis 45:5, 50:20). Likewise, Esther was made queen of Persia for the purpose of saving her people (Esther 4:14). Even the rulers of the Jews, the Gentiles, and the Romans were raised up by God at exactly the right moment in history to do all that God had planned regarding Christ Jesus' crucifixion (Acts 2:23, 4:27-28). Jesus lived and served under authority, and so do we.

SERVE UNDER AUTHORITY WHILE IN AUTHORITY

Studying Scripture reveals the one true and holy God—His nature, His purposes and plans, His will, and His commands. Christian leaders

serve under the authority of the state and nation, but they principally and ultimately bow the knee first to the absolute authority of God our Father, who creates and sustains all things. Laws and structures on earth flow from God's command for His image bearers to fill the earth, exercise dominion, and rule. Having been made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27), His law is written on people's hearts (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:10, 10:16), and cultures conform to His laws in various ways (Romans 2:14-15). Even relativists who deny absolute right and wrong will not wish to be stolen from, slandered, or killed. And since people know that wrong and evil exist, they must appeal to a standard against which others can recognize what is true, right, and acceptable.

Christians military leaders exercise command authority while living in right fear of God. Knowing that God has raised us up for good works at our own moment of history, we go to Him seeking wisdom for today's decisions, as well as for future decisions we are being prepared to make. Scripture, as interpreted by godly men and women throughout history, will generally answer our toughest questions about life and our place in it, but that doesn't mean it is easy to answer culture-driven or combat-related conundrums. Lead with a view to pleasing God in your decision-making, asking for counsel from trusted sources, and seeking to align your decisions with the commands made clear in Scripture. Jesus said to "fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28).

A God-fearing and moral leader who makes decisions according to revealed truth is a blessing to unit and nation. Good leadership causes people to rejoice (Proverbs 11:10). Godly leadership begins with submission to the governing authorities, so strive to know the rules and regulations governing your professional space. Learn the specific words found in the regulations, and think about the intent of those who wrote the rules. Rules usually protect life, keep military equipment in good condition, or guard the reputation of the service. Submitting to higher authorities encourages subordinates to follow regulations, and at the same time creates trust among our peers and superiors (1 Peter 2:13-17). Service members work best among ethically consistent professionals (you!), because they know they can trust one another when under fire.

ETHICS AND THE LAW OF ARMED CONFLICT

Ethical living can be described as living out "love God" and "love your neighbor." Jesus told His disciples that all people would know they were His disciples if they had love for one another (John 13:35). However,

can a military combatant love those who oppose them? Combatants must think about taking the life of an enemy long before that day comes, guarding their hearts so that justified national warfare is not replaced by personal, vindictive warfare. We execute combat missions with the greatest skill and lethality possible, but we also rejoice in the day our government reaches a cease-fire. We can love our enemy as a fellow image bearer while at the same time participating in lethal engagements. Learning to pray for your enemy, wherever or whoever they may be, will help guard your heart.

Our nation trains us regularly in the Laws of Armed Conflict, but laws alone are unable to guide us through every tough call. A biblically informed ethic can help make decisions where laws have gray areas. God the Holy Spirit trains our hearts in right thinking as we meditate on the words of Scripture, as we pray, and as we sit under Biblical teaching. Seek out counselors or mentors who help you think ethically. You might have a chaplain or JAG who is specially trained or gifted in ethics. Asking for help protects us from blindness, stubbornness, pride, and self-justification. Read the works of authors who wrestle with Christ-like thinking. Good thinking moves us beyond simply asking about what is legal. We do more than fulfill a job—we represent a nation, a people, a church, a family, and our God. Be sober minded. Further thoughts on serving can be found in places such as OCF’s publication, “May A Christian Serve in the Military?”

When you are faced with a challenging decision, such as when you disagree with a directive from your leadership, try writing out your question. Be as specific as possible about what you must decide. The starting principle is to “obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free” (Ephesians 6:5-8). If you know of a chaplain or JAG who specializes in military religious liberty or in the field you are wrestling with, then seek their advice. Once you reach a decision, be sure to obey with a heart attitude that allows you to, “do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent ...” (Philippians 2:14-15).

In addition to writing out your question, think about whether there is Scripture that might address your root concern. Consider what the Old Testament histories, Proverbs, Psalms, Gospels, or apostolic

instructions have to say. Ask who will be affected by your decision. Will the impact be singular, or will an entire unit be affected? Are you setting a precedent that is likely to be repeated? Pray about decisions, even if you are standing at the front of a room and others are watching (Nehemiah 2:1-5). Your decisions will be made more quickly and with greater confidence as this type of thinking becomes habitual. Proverbs 3:33-35 indicates that where the righteous live, there is blessing, honor, and favor. When explaining your decision, it is best to use culturally relevant language (plain English) rather than spiritual terms or references.

ONE COURAGEOUS PERSON

Finally, remember that group thinking, or a mob mentality, can rapidly develop within the military community. From basic training onward there is an expectation to conform to institutional norms, and that pressure can turn into a type of unit loyalty that trumps common ethical sense or rational thinking. Be alert to stop wrong words and actions when they first appear so they don't grow into bigger problems. The courage of one leader to call the team into alignment can save lives and protect an entire unit from moral injury resulting from sloppy thinking. For example, do not allow an enemy to be dehumanized by ugly labels or slang. Make sure the rules of engagement are explained with their intent in view. God places leaders in places where they can bring influence to bear, so be ready to apply a consistent ethic to military life. If we fear man, then we will try to fit in, seek acceptance, or be quiet. We must fear God alone, the One who has all authority and power, who delegates authority to whom He will, and before whom we always live (Luke 12:4-7; Daniel 4:17).

31: Assignments, Promotions, Retention

IN THIS CHAPTER

God works in the lives of His adopted children during the years they wear the uniform and are within the military community. Military life may yield promotions and good assignments, but we will also experience non-promotions and assignment locations we didn't see coming. In good times and in bad, we always grow, change, and are made into Christ-like servants learning to trust God's provision. Having served in the military will impact us and the people we serve with for the rest of our lives.

GOD IS ALWAYS RIGHT

All promotions and assignments come from the hand of God ... even non-promotions (Daniel 4:17, 25, 34-35). God must be acknowledged as sovereign over every part of His creation; otherwise, He becomes a God of man's limited imagination. In the book of Job, God teaches that even in pain we are not to insist on being right and demand that God explain His purposes to us, lest we accuse Him of doing wrong. "Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right" (Job 40:8)? Since God is good and cannot do wrong, in every circumstance we get to practice worshiping God before, during, and after promotion or assignment notifications, whether we are happy with the notification or not. We learn to say with Job, "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore, I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5-7). God has put His treasure of the gospel in jars of clay (us), "to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Corinthians 4:7).

SEEK COUNSEL

Most of us wrestle with decisions that impact our career path, the next assignment, deployment, and so on. Seek counsel from Scripture and from fellow believers, especially from those who have walked with God longer than you. This kind of Christian elder can help you sort out selfish motives from real desires to glorify God. Your daily study

of Scripture will do more than anything else to expose the motives of your heart, “For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). When looking back in time, you will see that every assignment was right for you (and your family). Therefore, you can be confident today that you are exactly where God has directed your steps. For couples and families, it is good to prioritize your marriage and family whenever you have the option to live and work together in the same location. Many who separated themselves for a year of school, or for a “family optional” assignment later regretted the time that was lost for the sake of perceived stability or professional advancement.

PROMOTIONS

Promotions to a higher rank mean a pay increase, a service commitment, and increased responsibility. As a steward of resources, then, you have been entrusted with much on behalf of the nation, but more importantly, you will give an answer to God for how His talents are used (Matthew 25:14-30). Steward your wealth, people, and time for His glory. Flee any desire to seek promotion for personal gain, identity, or sense of security. We labor in God’s field, doing our work unto Him, and we focus on the task of leading men and women of the military community for the good of our nation and for their good welfare.

ENTERING GOD’S REST

Study James 4:13-17 as part of a Scriptural diet for decision-making and knowing God’s rest, meditating on the implication of being “a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.” Draw near to Him in confidence that our time on earth is short, and our time in uniform will probably be shorter than our time on earth. Our declaration of “if the Lord wills” is not a trite phrase, it is a statement of who God is. He is the one who determines our steps (Proverbs 16:9). Christian officers are to be godly integrated leaders at home, TDY/TAD, and deployed, so regularly ask God for the wisdom to know the thing(s) you are to prioritize and focus on, lest you sin against Him in pursuing your own self-justified ends.

Serving in the military provides an opportunity to live out your presence as salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16). You carry the gospel with you on land, at sea, or in the air. Understanding this purpose should increase your eagerness to willingly volunteer for difficult tasks or

duties. Who better to serve in hard places than the one who has good news dwelling within? Lean into opportunities rather than standing by as a reluctant participant. Expect that God will stretch you, that He will close doors that are not timely or appropriate, and that you will be further developed as His servant.

IDENTITY AT SEPARATION OR RETIREMENT

We conclude this section by pondering two possible outcomes resulting from military service. The first outcome is that of a Christian leader ending the years of uniformed service more humble because of the trials faced, better equipped for future work among the nations of the world, and more aware of strengths and weaknesses as a result of leaning into the joint team. A different and worse outcome would be a Christian leader leaving uniform with regret, retaining pride, having self-focused confidence, or maybe harboring bitterness—all because their hard work didn't achieve the promotions sought, the affirmation of a military system is lost, or there remains a self-confidence in physical or mental abilities. To desire the first outcome requires us to increasingly know God while being aware of the threats to our spiritual health that come with professional military service (Proverbs 21:1-5).

One risk is finding personal worth among a wonderful cohort of fast-charging, high-performing individuals. Rejoice in the camaraderie brought about by shared experiences and endured hardships, but keep in mind that you are a pilgrim on earth, eager for an eternity in God's presence. Your identity is that of an adopted child of God, gifted with abilities He gave you to develop so that later in life these same skills will be used for the good of a new community.

Another danger comes when our motivation for serving becomes corrupted by wrong expectations or a sense of entitlement with special privileges. There is no rank when we leave the service. Practice humility and gratitude now, denying yourself privileges that don't enable you to do your job better. You are to "be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people" (Titus 3:1-2). You can accept the affirmation that comes from annual evaluations, awards, and reports without placing confidence in such recognition. There may be a day when you get passed over or leave the military before you want to. Trust God's daily provision, enter His rest, and allow Him to make all things right.

Expect that there will be a day when you will serve the church using some of the wisdom and skills learned in uniform. Know that you will leave the military changed. If you face hard times in uniform, if you persevere through days that are beyond your ability, and if you fail at a professional task or requirement, then be glad you will not have the same arrogance, pride, self-reliance, and biases you possessed upon entry. Even your understanding of Scripture and your view of the church will mature as you regularly study and meditate on God's Word.

We learn to appreciate the various expressions of Christ's church as we are exposed to diverse people who are brothers and sisters in Christ who also hold fast to the core truths of the Christian gospel. We become more humble, appreciative, and compassionate when working with believers from other denominational backgrounds. We are members of Christ's church who are learning to live on mission until all the sheep of our Shepherd's flock hear the good news and are brought from every nation, and then the end will come (Matthew 24:14).

32: Learning from Military Life

IN THIS CHAPTER

Those who serve in the military will be changed before they separate or retire, so what follows are some ways to think intentionally about capturing the good while resisting the bad of military culture. It is good that we get to serve alongside people different than us. It is also good that we learn to live disciplined lives, but serving within the government can make us dependent on government privileges if we are not alert to the danger of the insidious expectation that we deserve something.

POSITIVE CHANGE

So much of what we learn within the military profession is good and helpful to our personal life, our family, our church, and our community. When your family and friends watched you leave to join the military, they knew your military service would change you, and most expected you to be changed for the better. That means we need to think about what we are learning, or have learned, in military service. Which of these things might benefit others? What follows is a sample of things to consider.

YOU NEED PEOPLE DIFFERENT FROM YOU

We can begin by thinking about the wide variety of people we have gotten to know. Think of people with gifts and talents different from yours, people with different accents, people who have unique hobbies. Every one of them is a valuable part of the unit and team, and you give praise to God their Creator by developing their abilities and trusting them to grow. It is amazing to think how quickly the military gives responsibility to young men and women. Similarly, you can be quick to value the gifts and abilities of coworkers, family, and friends. Are there things you can turn over and trust others to do? No one will do a job the same way you would, but relational bonds develop as you trust others and give them new opportunities.

IMPROVE YOUR COMMUNICATION

Think also of how many ways you have been taught to communicate

at work. We are often expected to use drawings, pictures, handouts, and on-the-job training with step-by-step demonstrations. Try to use these various instructional styles in your personal life so visual and tactile learners, and those who need repetition, will retain what you are teaching. Practically, you could lead a Bible study or Sunday school class with the same diligence and lesson planning you use at work. If you are a parent, plan the tasks and building-block approaches for your children—just like the military taught you.

Commanders expect subordinates to ask regularly, “Who else needs this information?” Military operations require an informed and synchronized effort with regular updates for all who are involved. This is also true in the rest of life, so keep asking yourself who needs to know, hear, or help with what you have been entrusted. In an age of too much data, we can be helpful members of the body of Christ by sharing the right information at the right time. Within the local OCF fellowship, you can share TDY/TAD and deployment needs, write down prayer requests, and keep chaplains and pastors informed. Share with your spouse what is happening in your unit, and make sure your children learn about assignments, promotions, and deployments from you. Honor others by regularly communicating with them.

PLANNING AND FOLLOWING A SCHEDULE

Since the military is an intentional, deliberate organization, nearly everyone participates in a planning process. We learn to use checklists to ensure nothing is forgotten, and we conduct after-action reviews. Bring these skills into your personal life. Not only should you try to learn from past activities, but good planning of future events will decrease the stress of those in your home or group. When planning, you can use the Pray-Discover-Obey approach to help you remember the importance of being still in prayer and seeking God’s wisdom. Maybe you can execute a deliberate planning process, using the skills of those who are good planners, and develop checklists for executing the event. Take time afterwards to talk about what you learned and how to improve, and then document your lessons. If possible, include both adults and children in the planning and assessment process. Young boys and girls notice things that adults miss, and hopefully they will gain ownership and a desire to be involved in the activities.

DISTILL THE ESSENTIAL TASKS

The military requires currencies and qualification to assess readiness

for combat. Think about your personal life—what are your most important tasks? If you have a family, what are the things you want them to remain “current and qualified” on? It could be everything from safety skills to educational abilities to home maintenance processes. Pray about the mission God has given you (see PDO and Professional Calling chapters). Develop a Mission Essential Task List (METL) to carry out this mission. Then, since most of us learn by repetition, build a training program that develops muscle-memory type capabilities. Tasks might range from hospitality, cooking, camping, and backpacking skills, to first aid, CPR, fire escape, and family winter survival skills. You can include memorizing and meditating on God’s Word, remembering the books of the Bible in order, writing letters to family members, etc. Focus on what is important for your phase of life.

LEAD, SUBMIT, HAVE FUN, STUDY THE THREAT

For good reason, our professional environment requires both the exercise of leadership authority and the submission of followers. Similarly, every home needs a leader and followers. Leaders do not have greater value than followers. Leaders should know the strengths and abilities of followers, seeking their input to make decisions for the good of the whole body. Good decisions that are made in light of mission and purpose may take followers into tough situations that may not be comfortable or easy. If you are a follower, be a blessing by helping, advising, co-laboring, and motivating ... and staying on mission.

Maintain the exercise of self-control and self-discipline in your personal life. You have been given authority, relationships, and resources that need to be stewarded. The lives of a servant are not their own, since their job is to care for what belongs to the master. Therefore, pursue self-control in all things and discipline your body so that God’s temple is available for His purposes (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Even as every civilian expects the military to be fit to fight, Christians strive to be both physically and spiritually available for good work in this world.

Be sure to have fun. Military units work to develop integrity, partnership, and esprit de corps within their organizations. In much the same way, our personal lives and our churches need us to work at building cohesion among singles, couples, and families so that we have fun and build memories together. Shared memories develop group resilience when we hit hard times.

Our nation’s military exists to mitigate threats from its enemies. Not

everything that appears to be a threat is an enemy, and not every enemy is an immediate threat. They must be studied, analyzed, and prioritized. Take time to look at the culture in which God has placed you. What are the threats to you personally, to the church, to religious liberty, to sound doctrine, and to your ability to raise children to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ? Decide which threats are most imminent and which will require the most resources to counter, and then develop a plan to meet the threat(s). Ask God for wisdom in preparing for expected trials.

THINGS TO GUARD AGAINST

Now a caution. There are some things found in the military profession that should not be brought into our personal lives. One is the government worker's "use it or lose it" mentality that expends resources simply because there is a fear of losing out in next year's budget. Instead, see yourself as a steward of resources that ultimately belongs to God. Fulfill the obligations you have today, and do not presume on receiving a monthly paycheck lest you fail to budget or maybe decide to take on unnecessary debt.

Military members can sometimes be heard declaring that their profession is particularly hard or unpredictable. When speaking this way, we accidentally devalue the sacrifice made in other professions. Avoid a martyr mentality that sounds like whining to those who listen. Nearly every career has trials, hardships, and uncertainty, so be appreciative of agricultural, plumbing, and electrical trades, medical professionals, first responders, and the many other skilled people around you. Finally, the military rank structure gives positional authority for mission accomplishment, but you will be wise to practice relational skills for the day when you serve where no rank exists.

33: Threats & Opposition

IN THIS CHAPTER

If there were no enemy, then there would be no need for a military. If Satan and rulers in the heavenly places were not a real threat to the Christian, then the church would have had no need to stay alert, to put on armor and to hold fast in the face of lies, threats, deceptions, and mockery. Study the truth and draw near to Him whom we eagerly long to see at the end of days when He returns.

KNOW THE ENEMY

Military leaders equip, train, and prepare their unit with a particular threat in mind. Likewise, the Christian leader must study our spiritual enemy and be alert to threats outside and inside the Christian family. Some claim to be inside the Christian church, but their lives are not aligned with an obedience to Christ's commands in areas such as greed, immorality, covetousness, or drunkenness (1 Corinthians 5:9-13). In addition to internal threats, there are many false religions in the world, some being more easily spotted and identified than others. Since Satan is the deceiver and the father of lies, the Christian needs to learn to recognize authentic Christian teaching and doctrine (John 8:44). Be ready to correct wrong beliefs and disobedient living by those who call themselves Christians, but do not be surprised by the foolishness or immoral lifestyles of those outside the church. Leaders are obligated to gently and patiently correct and help the brother or sister who claims to be within the body of Christ (Matthew 18:15-20). Peter warns, "there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction" (2 Peter 2:1-3).

CHRISTIAN TRUTH

The Christian church expresses core truths in historical creeds such as the Apostles or Nicene Creed. We proclaim Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, sent by the Father to take on flesh (incarnation), and who dwelt among people while living a sinless life. He was crucified, dead, buried, then raised from the dead, appearing to many witnesses for 40 days, and

now sits at the right hand of His Father in heaven. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. In our faith, we are not to be proud or self-righteous as if we were wiser or more clever than others. Rather, Paul writes, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). This good news gives us rest because our faith is in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone.

STANDING FAST

So, how do we prepare to stand fast when opposed by the world, the flesh, and the devil? First, we need confidence that the Bible is God’s Word, inerrant and infallible, faithfully handed down to us for more than 2,000 years. The reliability of Scripture has been so thoroughly examined, and the historicity of the events, peoples, and places of the Bible so frequently validated by archeology, that the thoughtful Christian can quickly gain confidence that God has delivered His Word to His people so that we might know and obey Him, His plan, and His commands. False teaching may rely on visions, passion, tradition, or a desire to explain a view of God without any future judgment for sin. Opposing this, Peter wrote that “we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:19-21). The written word of God is adequate for knowing God, His work, our redemption and adoption, the coming judgment, and the restoration of all things.

Next, consider what the Bible tells us about God, His creation, man (male and female), the entry of sin into the world (the fall), salvation (through faith in Christ), the final judgment, and the long-awaited new heaven and new earth. Denial of these core truths can lead to false teaching. Paul says to the Galatians that he is “astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ” (Galatians 1:6-7).

To the Ephesians, Paul wrote, “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil” (Ephesians 6:10-11). Since

Paul's concluding words to the Ephesians address the church wrestling against rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, and spiritual forces of evil, it is worth your time to consider how you are taking up your armor: truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and the Word of God (Ephesians 6:12-20).

God inspired the apostles to write Scripture to deal with wrong teachings that were springing up in the early church (2 John 1:7-11), and we continue to face similar challenges to sound faith and practice. Today's lies have the same deceptions behind them, but they have been packaged for a modern era. Error propagates from teachings that say things like: spirit is good and flesh is bad; obedience brings prosperity in our lifetime; we should accommodate the culture to stay relevant; Christ did not come in real flesh and blood; people need to add their own works to Christ's work to ensure salvation; God sits passively back to see what man will do with His creation; those who believe in Christ can live immorally since they are "saved"; and the end is so near, people should stop working hard at their daily duties (1 Thessalonians 4:3-12).

FALSE TEACHERS

False teachers might seek followers more faithful to themselves than to a rigorous study of Scripture. They often add to or take away from our understanding of Christ's finished work of salvation, and they "disguise themselves as servants of righteousness" (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). Other insincere teachers add rules to obey, while they themselves justify their own disobedience to the moral law of God summarized in the Ten Commandments. Paul warned that "many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things" (Philippians 3:18-19).

We should be wary when a person seeks only the good things in this present life, expressed in the idea that God wants me to be happy (best life now). Others deny that the sin of Adam has been passed on to all mankind, and they reject present sufferings and trials as affecting believers and unbelievers alike. In contrast to this are the warning flags that pop when someone highlights their sufferings as making them more righteous or holy than those not having similar trouble. Christ Jesus affirmed that He suffered in obedience to His Father's will, and He taught His disciples to expect the same (Luke 9:22; John 15:18-20).

Created beings cannot use the power of speech to bring about new

realities, yet some false teachings declare man to be like God through a belief in the power of their uttered words. God alone is the creator and sustainer of life (Hebrews 1:1-3). Beyond dealing with false teaching, OCF leaders may have to deal with local participants who claim to be a part of the Christian church body even as they live immoral lives. It is essential for you to have the support and wisdom of local church elders, pastors, or similar leaders when you face this kind of internal challenge. *(See the “Local Church Membership” chapter for amplified thoughts.)*

SAME WORDS, DIFFERENT MEANING

Finally, it is particularly difficult to sort out what is true when there is a false gospel masquerading as belief in the same Jesus Christ in whom the historic church believes. These religious groups may use some of the same terms and language of the historic Christian faith, yet they change the meaning of the words to accommodate their divergent beliefs. Some groups and cults have modified the Bible in order to deliver a translation that aligns with their teaching. These alternate translations are not faithful to the original manuscripts.

Most of the groups that proclaim a different, Christian-sounding faith are historically modern. Many formed within the United States during the 1800s and 1900s, and every one of them denies the work of Jesus Christ as the only eternal Son of God who came to earth in human form, lived a sinless life before His crucifixion, was buried and resurrected from the dead, and sits now at the right hand of God interceding for the saints until He comes again in glory to judge. May God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit give you wisdom to discern the one gospel of Jesus Christ faithfully delivered over the last 2,000 years.

ESSENTIAL PARTS OF THE BODY

34: The OCF Directory

IN THIS CHAPTER

Every OCF member needs to know how to find the OCF Directory, use it, and help others navigate the Directory to connect men and women in fellowship around the world—*this connects us to other family members.*

CONNECTING FOR FELLOWSHIP

Our primary tool for OCF members to find fellowship is the OCF Directory (ocfusa.org/directory). This Directory is useful only if our members keep fellowship opportunities visible and up to date. Please add the OCF Directory to your temporary duty/transition/moving checklist (update listings, remove old listings, or publish a new listing). Transitions are also a good time to share your new mailing address and other updates such as rank or married status.

THE OCF DIRECTORY IN ACTION

The OCF Directory has a very specific purpose: It is for you to find other members so that you stay connected in Christian fellowship during TDY/TAD visits, seek lodging when traveling, and jump right into an OCF group at new assignments. It is used by OCF staff and volunteers to help initiate linkups and handoffs for anyone who wants help answering the question, “Is there fellowship at a specific location?” Our OCF Directory page is arranged by state and country (List, Grid, or Map view). The Directory entries list the roles of our volunteers (Local Leader, Contact, Hospitality Home, etc.), their contact information, and often the day, time, and unique details of the specific location. The OCF Directory is your first stop to connect you with a person, group, or Hospitality Home wherever you go.

Don’t miss the opportunity to stay encouraged and connected during a TDY/TAD, deployment, or PCS. Your spiritual health and resilience are bolstered by connecting with the larger OCF body. Not only will it benefit your spiritual growth, but it should also benefit the OCF believers with whom you connect. (They list themselves with the hope God will use them, so it is a HUGE blessing when you reach out.) Use email, text, or video to introduce yourself or others. A video call might

help speed up the sense of being welcome before you arrive.

BECOMING VISIBLE (BE FINDABLE)

We need you to help new arrivals find fellowship, to feel welcome, and to know they are part of the family. This requires being visible and thus “findable.” Think of being visible in the Directory as if you are providing a standing invitation for OCF family members to come visit you for fellowship (you do not want to miss their visit). Pray about whether to list yourself, asking God if He will give you the time and energy to welcome people.

Listing yourself in the OCF Directory should not be done by your own strength and wisdom, because we know the pace of life does not give “enough time” for all you want to do—so pray first. God may help you realize that being busy is simply normal, and that you cannot “wait until” some future item is checked off your to-do list before jumping into action. We encourage you to get in fellowship before the boxes are unpacked, the job is settled, or the children are in school. If there is no OCF Directory listing at your location, please pray about making yourself visible.

Once you are ready to be visible in the OCF Directory, please navigate to the “List Me” form on OCF’s website (ocfusa.org/list-me). If you are not yet an OCF member, first navigate to “Join,” then come back to the “List Me” drop-down menu since only OCF members are listed in the Directory. Note that a new “List Me” form is required for every role, because different information is displayed for different types of listings. For example, you can be both an OCF Contact and provide an OCF Hospitality Home, but they require different information in each form.

TRAVEL AND PCS OPPORTUNITIES: CONNECT (LINK UP) AND HAND OFF

Biblical encouragement should go wherever OCF members travel. When you are in a new place, seek out local OCF fellowship, whether for Bible study or to meet a local leader over coffee. Don’t be shy about telling them what is happening in your OCF body back home so they can be encouraged by hearing about what you share. The same should happen when you return home—tell your home group what God did while you were away from them. It is so good to hear testimony of God’s work in the lives of His people around the world!

An OCF Directory linkup occurs when you help connect traveling or moving members to an OCF leader or contact in the new location. For deployment linkups, call (800) 424-1984 if there is no public listing. Connect yourself, or your friends, to fellowship by finding who to email/text at the destination installation, city, or country. A good method of connecting members to each other is to text or use video as a means of introduction. The advantage of a video introduction is that it provides a familiar face upon arrival. The Directory may indicate the day, time, and approximate location of a group's meeting. If there is no OCF Contact or Leader listed in the directory, contact an OCF staff member or call the OCF Home Office at (800) 424-1984. Remember, friends don't let friends travel without an OCF linkup.

Since the OCF Directory is the primary way members connect with other members for fellowship, we need persistent help keeping it accurate and up to date. Notify the Home Office when you need to update your personal Directory listing. If you discover an error, you may also call (800) 424-1984. Let us know if you send an email and/or text to a Local Leader/Contact/Hospitality Home and do not hear back from them. Try a second contact using another means if possible, and if that still doesn't work, please let us know that the Directory has a Local Leader/Contact/Hospitality Home who could not be reached. Our Local Leaders get deployed or move, and we need to know when a listing is no longer current. Don't hesitate to share thoughts, experiences, prayer requests, and insights after using the OCF Directory.

The success or failure of OCF continuity hangs largely on the way the current Local Leader executes a "baton pass." Successful hand-offs keep the member-led nature and character of our fellowship alive and our OCF Directory up to date. No one knows what is happening in the field like those who are in the field.

35: Council & Staff

IN THIS CHAPTER

The OCF Council governs the ministry of OCF, and they hire the Executive Director of OCF. The staff of OCF supports the members of OCF by encouraging Christian obedience and integrity, equipping Christ's body in accession and education locations, connecting members to one another, developing resources for the field, sending laborers to the field, caring for ministry monies, maintaining and developing OCF's facilities, communicating the ministry of OCF outside the organization, and praying for the OCF body.

THE COUNCIL

The corporation of Officers' Christian Fellowship is led by a Council (which functions as a Board of Directors, but which is representative of the larger OCF membership) of spiritually qualified military peers, and it is run by an Executive Director who is enabled by a team of field and support staff. While much of the staff has extensive experience from within the military, all the OCF Council come from within the military. The membership of the OCF Council is determined by both the OCF Constitution (6-22 regular members) and by OCF's Bylaws. Council membership has historically been representative of the military service components, ranks, sexes, ethnicity, and active/reserve components.

THE STAFF

The OCF Council hires the Executive Director, and the Executive Director is responsible for hiring the rest of the staff—both field and support staff. We prioritize Field Staff positions at the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard Academy ministries, at education or gateway locations (where officers typically have longer dwell times at specific career points), and to operate OCF Conference Centers. Examples of gateway ministry locations are Maxwell, Leavenworth, Newport, Quantico, and Pensacola. These gateways are examples of assignments where leaders from all services spend months, if not years, in a learning environment. The purpose of having OCF staff in the field is to cast

vision, to equip growing leaders, and to send leaders out as effective facilitators and trainers of future ministers of the gospel. We want to train leaders who will in turn train others in member-led military ministry (2 Timothy 2:2). Support staff enable all parts of the OCF ministry as they answer inquiries, collect prayer requests, manage databases, support financial accountability, find ways to touch the lives of military members in the field, and run conference center ministry.

Since the military community is made up of many ranks, ages, service components, sexes, and ethnicities, the activities and leadership of OCF should broadly reflect the beauty of this diverse body. Leaders need to reach out widely, to invite men, women, and children who are in the community where they are assigned. In a deployed environment the ministry will be different than at home station and in garrison. At home, the fellowship opportunities can expand to include dependents, government civilians, contractors, and retirees. For leaders who host OCF fellowships in a university setting or in communities away from military installations, the local fellowship might be made up of few uniformed members and more people who are part of a non-military community.

36: Like-Minded, Military-Focused Ministries

INITIATE THE CONNECTION

Since OCF operates within the larger body of Christ's church, our leaders in the field should be aware of like-minded parachurch ministries who are laboring nearby and should be the initiators of coordinating and supporting relationships. ACCTS, MCYM's Club Beyond, Cru Military, Valor, Navigators, Cadence, Tun Tavern, Military Missions Network, Planting Roots, etc., are examples of non-profit Christian ministries in the military community space. Get to know the people and leaders of other ministries, find out what the ministry is focused on and how they do their work, and discover whether there is some way you can be a blessing to them and they to you. OCF members bear the responsibility to initiate contact, because you are the ones who have military leadership responsibility and ought to be ready to work toward a mutually beneficial Christian relationship. This doesn't mean you have answers, it simply means you are responsible for relationship building. By reaching out in love, you can improve communication and partnership, and you can encourage others in their work. Humble contact will prevent wrong perceptions and simultaneously give OCF a good reputation in the field.

VALUE THE DIFFERENCES

Every part of Christ's body brings a different impact within His church. OCF exists to make the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ visible and heard around the world, not to exalt or lift up the "banner" of OCF. We want to be known for getting Christians connected to the right person, group, chaplain, and church body. For example, some ministries are excellent at marriage counseling, some are particularly effective at planning high adventure events, and others are great at engaging youth. At some installations there are ministries with access to, and impact in, the barracks or dorms. Every part of the body of Christ is needed, so the OCF leader's job is to endeavor to know who is serving alongside them. May you be one who is known for loving fellow laborers out in the field. Jesus said many will know that we are Christ's disciples if we love one another well (John 13:35). If you have questions, call the OCF Home Office at (800) 424-1984 to see what we know about the staff or volunteers of organizations near you.

37: OCF's Home Office

WHAT HAPPENS IN COLORADO

Our ministry is run and coordinated from OCF's Home Office, a name harkening back to when OCU communication and accounting was accomplished in the basement of Buck and Louisa Buxton's home. The Home Office invites you to visit any time you're passing through the Colorado area! We consider visitors to be like family stopping by for a cup of coffee or a conversation. Our daily rhythm and staff schedules vary each week (especially as we get better at working from distributed offices), so calling ahead is helpful if you want to visit with a specific part of the staff.

The Home Office team includes the Executive Director and Deputy Executive Director, along with staff who oversee the Finance, Resource Development, Communications, Field Operations, Member Care, and Human Resource specialties.

Every weekday morning, the Home Office staff stops routine work to gather for group study of the Scriptures and to pray. The staff then prays for our members (you send in the prayer requests), writes cards to deployed and overseas personnel, and updates one another on events impacting the entire OCF family.

The Home Office is where most member inquiries are handled and where your requests for materials to support local fellowships and conferences are responded to. Think of the Home Office as a small nerve center that helps connect OCF members to one another by doing things like managing the OCF member database, providing linkups between members, and working to keep the online OCF Directory up to date. The greatest joy for the OCF Home Office team is seeing members grow and thrive in Christ throughout the military!

OCF COMMUNICATIONS

The Communications team aims to have “The right channel for the right audience at the right time.”

Throughout most of its history, OCF communications largely included only two primary channels: print and face-to-face. Digital communications methods now include audio and video, giving OCF five ways to communicate with a diverse membership that is glad to receive

information from the staff in a variety of ways.

Print Communications: Printed material is particularly helpful in deployed locations and where the internet is not available. Several publications are also available in PDF form to download from the OCF website—from COMMAND (a biannual magazine focused on relevant, timeless content) and Connected (a biannual newsletter focused exclusively on ministry news and events) to several longstanding topical booklets such as “Leading Effective Small Groups,” “100 Days Devotional,” and “May A Christian Serve in the Military?” OCF also has several dozen Bible studies that are available both in digital format online and for PDF download.

Digital Communications: The OCF website is the hub of our digital communications efforts. The website houses OCF’s Directory, numerous articles, Bible study downloads, ministry information, podcasts, videos, and projects such as the Integrated Faith Project. Other methods of digital communications include OCF’s social media channels, which show ministry in action (i.e., Facebook, Instagram). We publish email newsletters focused on specific audiences such as those who lead OCF fellowship groups and other newsletters that keep the broader OCF membership informed of time-sensitive ministry news. We expect to maintain a virtual ministry presence where the staff can connect with OCF members, and where members can interact with one another.

Audio Communications: In 2018, OCF launched its first podcast, “OCF Crosspoint.” The show includes interviews with guests on a variety of topics while sharing stories of military life at the intersection of faith, family, and profession. OCF’s second podcast, “Leader, Draw Near,” was released as a limited-run, 54-episode show based on the book by the same name written by Col Larry and Bobbie Simpson, USAF (Ret.). The podcast is a short, weekly devotion for leaders and includes downloadable worksheets. OCF has plans to build an audio library that covers topics on mentoring, family, spiritual growth, and more.

Video Communications: OCF released an inaugural video series featuring conference center summer speakers and plans to increase video production and expand its library of OCF-generated video content. In addition, OCF offers access to RightNow Media, which houses a vast collection of Christian videos.

Face-to-Face Communications: This remains the heart of the OCF

ministry. It involves in-person relationship and fellowship, such as what is found during year-round programming at OCF Conference Centers, in local Bible study fellowship groups, in mentoring relationships, and any number of other opportunities in which OCF members gather face to face.

OCF FINANCES

Some of you do not find finance or accounting practices interesting, but they are a critical part of non-profit accountability. We are a charter member of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA). We receive regular fiscal health checkups by an auditor, and we pay attention to the requests of members who have donated funds. What follows is a brief overview of what you may want to know. Don't hesitate to ask if you have more questions.

It takes millions of annual dollars to run the whole of OCF ministry. This requires a significant annual budgeting process to ensure we can hire and field staff, maintain facilities, support Strategic and Operational plans for outreach to, and fellowship in, the military community, and to operate two conference centers. In addition to supporting the personnel of OCF, giving enables the maintenance and further development of more than 70 buildings owned across six states.

To operate with maximum transparency and accountability to our members, and in compliance with current law, OCF receives an annual external audit of our financial processes to ensure we conform to generally accepted accounting practices. Members who donate resources to OCF are worshiping God through their offerings, so we seek to honor God by holding and spending funds in good faith. These cash and non-cash donations are received, accounted for, spent, and further developed to enable OCF's ministry work.

Donations to OCF are received through a web interface (ocfusa.org/donate), by mail, and/or through the donation of non-cash items (e.g., vehicles, stock, real estate). Donations can be designated for a specific area of OCF's work (e.g., a field location or conference center), or they can be donated to the general fund and used in the overall execution of ministry. General fund giving is critical for OCF to pay staff salaries, cover travel expenses, meet administrative expenses, and to keep our OCF-owned facilities maintained.

OCF's fiscal year begins annually on June 1 and runs through May 31, giving time for staff to plan and account for expenses when the staff's ministry load best allows this work to be done. All gifts designated to any OCF ministry area other than to support general operations will be applied exclusively to support your chosen ministry until that ministry's full annual budgeted need is met. After that criterion is satisfied, OCF may apply any excess funds to further the overall OCF outreach to the military.

The annual audit ensures we are using best practices of the non-profit sector, that we are meeting donor intent, and that we have checks and balances in place to ensure the integrity of our accounting practices. This audit report is briefed to the OCF Council to fulfill their fiduciary responsibility. In addition, OCF files an IRS Form 990, Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax on an annual basis. Our audited financial statements and the Forms 990 are posted on OCF's website when they are completed.

OCF RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

OCF is sustained financially primarily by the donations and support of our members. While joining OCF requires no membership fee, the reality is that, along with conference center user fees, OCF's work is sustained by the monthly gifts of members. For more than 75 years, OCF members have gladly given to God's work of ministering within the military society.

During the final phase of our successful multi-year Capital Campaign early in the 21st Century, OCF launched a Resource Development Team (RDT) to identify, cultivate and diversify donation revenue streams through expanded gift and estate planning offerings, foundation grants, and corporate matching gift programs. Our hope is that God will help us develop new revenue streams to position OCF for expanded ministry outreach and impact in the military community.

You, the OCF member, donate about 60% of our operating budget, while conference center revenue makes up the other 40%. You keep the ministry healthy. You encourage the men and women of the military society to reach out to their neighbors with the hands and feet of Christ's body, to host Bible studies and various kinds of fellowship, to serve at home and deployed, and to become ever more effective parts of the greater church body. Please pray about how to financially support the work of OCF on a regular basis.

THANK YOU!

Thank you for reading and considering the thoughts and concepts presented in the OCF Handbook! What a joy to have written it, to have received so much feedback from members and staff throughout its development, and now to have it in your hands so that we can grow into a more unified and effective ministry. If you have input for future editions, please contact the OCF Home Office, (800) 424-1984 or (303) 761-1984 or contact@ocfusa.org.

MINISTRY DOCUMENTS AND HISTORY

A: OCF Foundational Statements & Thoughts (Summarized)

STATEMENT OF FAITH

Inasmuch as I am a sinner and deserve the wrath of God, and since Jesus Christ died for my sins, was buried, and has been bodily resurrected, according to the Scriptures, I have accepted Him as my own personal Lord and Savior and am saved by His grace alone.

STATEMENT OF PARTICIPATION

I am committed to the purpose of OCF: To glorify God by uniting Christian officers for Biblical fellowship and outreach, equipping, and encouraging them to minister effectively in the military society. As an expression of my commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ and to His work in the military society, I will participate actively and prayerfully in the ministry of OCF with my time, talents, spiritual gifts, and financial resources. I further commit, by God's grace, to live my life as an example consistent with Biblical guidelines.

PURPOSE

To glorify God by uniting Christian officers for Biblical fellowship and outreach, equipping, and encouraging them to minister effectively in the military society.

VISION

The military community positively impacted through Christ-like leaders.

MISSION

OCF engages military leaders in Biblical fellowship and growth to equip them for Christ-like service at the intersection of faith, family, and profession.

PILLARS (CUE LINES)

1. Centering on Scriptures
2. Uniting for Fellowship
3. Engaging in Prayer
4. Lay-led
5. Integrating Faith and Profession
6. Nurturing the Family
7. Equipping to Serve
8. Supporting the Chaplaincy

DISTINCTIVES

1. Member-Led
2. Dual Calling
3. Lifetime Fellowship

GUIDELINES FOR OCF MEMBER CONDUCT (OCF Bylaws)

The following OCF Biblical Guidelines of Conduct should be used to guide all OCF members in their personal walk and professional life:

- 1. Strive to follow Jesus, obey His teachings, and become more Christ-like** (Philippians 4:8-9, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 1 Peter 1:14-16, 1 John 1:8-10, 1 John 2:4-6).
- 2. Serve as unto the Lord** (Matthew 5:16, Acts 5:29, Colossians 3:23-24).
- 3. Let God judge the heart while we examine the fruit of fellow believers** (Matthew 7:15-20, 1 Corinthians 5:12-13, 2 Timothy 2:24-26).
- 4. Do not glorify, condone, or live in unrepentant sin** (Romans 6:1-2, 1 Corinthians 6:9- 11, Galatians 2:20, 1 John 2:1).

GUIDELINES FOR OCF LEADER CONDUCT (OCF Bylaws)

OCF Leaders, in the conduct of their ministry on behalf of OCF, follow the guidelines for member conduct and are Bible-based servant-leaders (Matthew 18: 4-6, John 13:12-17, Philippians 2:3-5, Titus 1:6-9).

Note: Bible Verses cited in conduct guidelines are a starting point, not an exhaustive list to support the Guidelines, and verses are listed in order as they appear in the Bible, not in priority order.

OCF FOUNDATIONS GRAPHIC

PURPOSE

To glorify God by uniting Christian officers for Biblical fellowship and outreach, equipping and encouraging them to minister effectively in the military society

VISION

The military community positively impacted through Christ-like leaders

MISSION

OCF engages military leaders in Biblical fellowship and growth to equip them for Christ-like service at the intersection of faith, family, and profession.

PILLARS

Centering on Scripture	Uniting for Fellowship
Engaging in Prayer	Lay-Led
Integrating Faith & Profession	Nurturing the Family
Equipping to Serve	Supporting the Chaplaincy

DISTINCTIVES

Member-led	Dual Calling	Lifetime Fellowship
------------	--------------	---------------------

CENTER OF GRAVITY

Uniformed Christ-like leaders

B: Constitution & Bylaws

OCF CONSTITUTION

Article I – Name

The name of this organization shall be “Officers’ Christian Fellowship of the United States of America,” further referred to herein as “OCF” or the “Fellowship.”

Article II – Purpose

OCF’s purpose is to glorify God by uniting Christian officers for Biblical fellowship and outreach, equipping and encouraging them to minister effectively in the military society.

Article III - Statement of Doctrine

The following is the Doctrinal Statement of OCF. All Council Members, Field Staff, and Support Staff who are designated by the Executive Director, must subscribe to this statement without reservation:

1. We believe in one God, eternally existing in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2. We believe that the Old and New Testaments as originally written are the verbally inspired Word of God and accept them as the supreme and all-sufficient authority in faith and life.
3. We believe that man was created in the image of God, but that he sinned and thereby incurred not only physical death, but also spiritual death, which is eternal separation from God; and that each human being is born with a sinful nature and cannot by his own efforts please God.
4. We believe that Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit, was born of the Virgin Mary, and is true God and true man.
5. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins as our vicarious sacrifice in accordance with the Scripture, and that all who believe in Him are cleansed of their sins by His shed blood and are justified before God.

6. We believe that all who by faith receive the Lord Jesus Christ are born again of the Holy Spirit and so become the children of God, to live with Him through all eternity.

7. We believe in the resurrection of the crucified body of our Lord, in His ascension into heaven, and in His present life there as our High Priest and Advocate.

8. We believe in the bodily resurrection of the just and unjust; the eternal blessedness of the saved; and the everlasting, conscious punishment of the lost.

9. We believe in the personal, visible, and glorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ to this earth.

Article IV – Membership

1. Membership in OCF shall be of three classes: Regular, Associate, and Honorary.

2. All applicants for Regular and Associate Membership shall subscribe to the statements of Faith, Participation, and the Biblical Guidelines without reservation. These three items are found in the OCF Bylaws.

3. The Regular Membership of OCF shall consist of present and former officers or warrant officers of the Armed Forces of the United States, and anyone training for such commissions, who subscribe to the Statements of Faith, Participation, and the Biblical Guidelines as stated in the Bylaws.

4. The Associate Membership shall include those not eligible for Regular Membership, but who have committed to the purposes of OCF and subscribe to the statement of Faith, Participation, and the Biblical Guidelines as stated in the Bylaws.

5. The Honorary Membership shall consist of those persons whose faith and belief are known to be in accord with the Statement of Doctrine in Article III, and who have been elected to such membership by the Council.

6. Associate and Honorary members are non-voting members of OCF.

7. Regular, Associate, and Honorary Membership in OCF shall continue unless terminated by the following provisions.

- a. Written resignation by the member.
- b. Action by the majority vote of the Council.
- c. Failure of the member to confirm interest in continuing membership within 90 days after the last of three attempts to deliver written communication.

Article V – Council

1. Composition and Term of Office

- a. OCF shall be governed by a Council consisting of not less than six and not more than twenty-two Regular Members of OCF, including the Executive Director. No other staff member is eligible to serve on the Council.
- b. The OCF Council functions as the OCF Board of Directors

2. Council Responsibilities

- a. The corporate role of the Council is to:
 1. Determine the OCF’s vision, mission, purposes, and strategic direction.
 2. Provide policies to achieve vision and strategic intent.
 3. Select, onboard, and transition the ED to implement vision, mission, and strategic direction; empower, support, and provide oversight of the ED
 4. Ensure fiduciary and financial integrity to maintain OCF’s viability and sustainability.
 5. Monitor organizational health, including over-the-horizon health. Set priorities.

6. Account to God for a Christ-like organization, anchored in Scripture and orthodox in faith. Codify and cultivate organizational values.

7. Develop and engage strategic stakeholders both internal and external to the organization. Advance and advocate for OCF's vision inside and outside the military. Raise friends and funds.

8. Self-govern by structuring the Council and onboarding, developing, evaluating, and transitioning Council Members.

b. The Council is authorized to make such Bylaws and Governance policies as are necessary for the orderly conduct of the Council and the affairs of the Fellowship.

Article VI – Officers

1. The OCF Council officers shall consist of a President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer.

2. The officers of the Corporation shall consist of the Executive Director, Director of Finance, and the four OCF Council officers.

3. Officers of OCF shall be elected by the Council for a one-year term.

4. Officers of OCF shall be elected at the last regularly scheduled meeting of the fiscal year. Installation of the new Council Members and Officers shall become effective on the first day of the following June or as directed by the Council.

5. The title of President Emeritus shall be conferred upon those who are distinguished in past service as President of OCF entitles them to honorary status. This title shall be conferred by a two-thirds vote of the Council on those former Presidents nominated by members of the Council or by the Executive Director and may be retracted by the same procedure. President Emeritus status confers the right to attend Council meetings as an official part in the Council discussions. It does not include the right to make or second motions or to vote on questions before the Council.

Article VII – Executive Director

1. The Executive Director is charged with the management of OCF under the authority and guidance of the Council.
2. The Executive Director shall be appointed to a term of unspecified length upon affirmative vote by two-thirds of the Membership of the Council. Termination of the appointment by the Council also requires the vote of two-thirds of the Membership of the Council. The vote in each instance shall be by written ballot.
3. The Executive Director shall be assisted by a Support Staff and Field Staff.
4. The Executive Director shall select and appoint the Support Staff without Council approval. With the consultation and advice of the Council, the Executive Director shall select and appoint the Field Staff to positions authorized by the Council.
5. All salaries shall be established by the Executive Director, except for that of the Executive Director, which shall be established by the Council.
6. The Executive Director shall establish appropriate procedures for informing the Regular Membership of a proposed Constitutional Amendment of substantive changes to it and report the results to the Council and the voters.

Article VIII – Ratification.

This Constitution shall be declared ratified upon approval by two-thirds of those voting in a ballot conducted as directed by the Council among the Regular Membership of OCF.

Article IX – Amendments

1. Amendments to the Constitution may be proposed by the Council or ten Regular members.
2. Amendments will be adopted when approved by two-thirds of those voting in a ballot conducted as directed by the Council among the Regular Membership of OCF.
3. Any typographical errors that do not affect the intent, specified

requirements, authority, or application of the Constitution may be corrected by a majority vote of the Council.

Bylaws

The bylaws state that OCF's principal office and place of business is in Colorado, and they specify Council powers, qualifications, committees, budgets, meetings, and officer elections, as well as Corporation Staff, Guidelines for Member Conduct, and other legal requirements. The bylaws are updated by the Council as needed, so are not reproduced here. Please contact the OCF Home Office with questions, (800) 424-1984.

C: A Brief History of OCF

Military men and women throughout the ages have often served in harm's way, separated from loved ones. Many are like a British Army captain who served in the mid-1850s, who because of his longing for Christian fellowship, started a military fellowship that became the precursor to our modern-day OCF. That desire for community with those who share their military lifestyle and Christian values led to a Bible study in a Washington, D.C., home that continued for several years. In [December of] 1943, at the urging of the British Officers' Christian Union (OCU), leaders incorporated OCU in the United States and was renamed Officers' Christian Fellowship (OCF) in 1972.

With the demobilization of the U.S. Armed Forces after World War II, OCU leaders prioritized ministry to cadets and midshipmen at pre-commissioning locations. By 1946, ministries were underway at the U.S. Naval Academy and the U.S. Military Academy and were later expanded to the U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Air Force Academies.

By the 1950s, OCU's impact began to be felt in units, duty stations, and military installations across the nation and world as local Bible studies were established. Numerous conferences took place as well. The OCU BULLETIN was split into two periodicals—COMMAND magazine and the OCU Newsletter. The decade also saw establishment of the OCU governing council, approval of an OCU constitution, the adoption of the British OCU's Pray and Plan (now Pray-Discover-Obey) model, and the council's appointment of Captain Cleo Buxton, USAR, as the first general secretary (executive director).

Buxton gathered a corps of Bible teachers as speakers for the growing conference ministry with the vision of summer conferences and training programs to offer both inspiring vacation time and intense training for young officers and officer candidates. In 1962, OCU held its first summer events in Buena Vista, Colo., at Spring Canyon (SC), and starting in 1978, at White Sulphur Springs in Manns Choice, Pa. Distinctive programs such as Rocky Mountain High (RMH) and Allegheny Outback (AO!) are now offered every summer. OCF has been involved in allied ministry outreach to Christians of foreign militaries, helping host guests in local fellowships and in military Christian conferences held in various parts of the world.

In the 1970s and '80s, Executive Director Paul Pettijohn and the OCF

Council began to place staff couples at service academies as well as at military training and education locations like Fort Leavenworth, Kan., and in later decades, Maxwell-Gunter AFB, Ala., and NAS Pensacola, Fla. By the 1990s-2000s, OCF's ministry efforts included training conferences, staff visits of local OCF groups, and sustained outreach at service academies and military education centers. The result was that OCF members and spouses have led fruitful ministries both abroad and at home, including every theater where OCF members have been sent.

As countless military members, families, and friends attended OCF conference centers to be equipped, encouraged, and refreshed for Christ-like leadership and service, OCF recognized the need for new lodging facilities at both WSS and SC. The OCF Growing and Building capital campaign, which launched in 2006, culminated with WSS's Heritage House and Spring Canyon's Veterans Memorial Lodge and new Fort Shine.

Since its infant days in the 1940s, the ministry of OCF has expanded in both staffing priorities and in the way we serve the military-focused body of Christ through communications, conferences, and helping members connect with one another. OCF crossed the threshold of print communications into the digital world by offering online Bible studies, local leader resources, article archives, social media, and multiple podcast programs. The focus remains on personal relationship with OCF's lay leaders, who are the hands and feet of Christ within the military community. There have been several books and articles written about the history, growth, and work of OCF and its members, so please ask the Home Office for recommendations for further reading.

1943 Certificate of Incorporation

First. The name or title by which the corporation shall be known in law shall be Officers' Christian Union of the United States of America. (The ministry's name changed in 1972 from "Union" to "Fellowship.")

Second. The term for which it is organized shall be perpetual.

Third. The particular business and objects of said corporation shall be:

1. To bind together officers serving, or who have served, in the Armed Forces of the United States of America, who own allegiance to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

2. To utilize the Spiritual Force of the Union to help all ranks, grades and ratings to come to a knowledge of Jesus Christ, our Lord, Whom to know is life eternal, and to this end to stimulate and encourage members in definite and regular prayer, Bible study and Christian witness, for their mutual improvement and growth in grace.

Certificate of Incorporation

✠

We, the undersigned, all citizens of the United States, and a majority citizens and residents of the District of Columbia, desiring to associate ourselves as a corporation pursuant to the provisions of Title 5 of Chapter 5 of the Code of the District of Columbia, do hereby certify as follows:

First. The name or title by which this corporation shall be known in law shall be
Officers' Christian Union of the United States of America.

Second. The term for which it is organized shall be **perpetual.**

Third. The particular business and objects of said corporation shall be

1. To bind together officers serving, or who have served in the Armed Forces of the United States of America who own allegiance to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

2. To utilize the Spiritual Force of the Union to help all ranks, grades and ratings to come to a ~~maximum~~ knowledge of Jesus Christ, our Lord, Whom to know is life eternal, and to this end to stimulate and encourage members in definite and regular prayer, Bible study and Christian witness, for their mutual improvement and growth in grace.

Fourth. The number of its trustees, directors, or managers for the first year of its existence shall be **Three (3).**

In Testimony Whereof, we have this 31st day of December, 1943, hereunto set our hands and seal.

Raymond A. Brown (SEAL)
Gordon H. Nichol (SEAL)
James H. ... (SEAL)

D: Glossary

Accessions: Routes for entering military service as commissioned officers; includes service academies, ROTC, OCS/OTS, as well as other routes for commissioned officers to enter military service.

AO! (Allegheny Outback!): White Sulphur Springs' outdoor high school program.

Area: Describes a grouping of more than one local leader or fellowship. Areas may exist to encompass multiple fellowships, members within a military functional community (e.g., submarine force), or those within a geographically related ministry effort.

Associate Member: Those not eligible for Regular Membership, but who subscribe to the Statements of Faith and Participation (defined by OCF Constitution).

Associate Staff: Volunteer staff who serve a specific role. Associate Staff agree to a job description, training, and accountability.

Camp Caleb: White Sulphur Springs' outdoor youth program (3rd-8th grade).

Climb Together: Spring Canyon's parent-youth outdoor adventure program (ages 8-13).

Contact: An advocate for the ministry of OCF who helps others find Christian fellowship and local insights (churches, Bible studies, schools, housing, etc.). Contacts help develop our sense of OCF family.

Coordinator (Regional Coordinator, Area Coordinator, etc.): The coordinator is responsible for encouraging, equipping, and overseeing OCF local leaders, contacts, and activities for a designated location. Coordinators receive member linkups, welcome new arrivals. Designated, trained, and assigned a prefix as appropriate such as Area, Base, Country, Post, Station, etc.

Council: The governing body of OCF, assembled according to the OCF Constitution and Bylaws.

Council Member: A member currently serving a term on the Council.

EXSEL (Experience, Serve, Lead): A yearlong discipleship program for young adults (ages 18-24) that integrates spiritual growth, vocational experience, and educational opportunities in the context of serving on staff at White Sulphur Springs.

Fellowship House: OCF-owned USMA ministry house, property, and staff residence.

Field Staff: Staff ministry roles executed in the field as authorized and funded by the OCF Council (defined by OCF Constitution).

FTA (Father Teen Adventure): Spring Canyon's outdoor father and teen program.

Gateway: Military location having post-accession education and/or training responsibilities (such as Benning, Maxwell, Leavenworth, and Pensacola). Education Centers enable better ministry engagement than operational locations.

Greeter: A seasoned member of the Warrior Connect program who immediately welcomes new OCF members who have signed OCF's Statement of Faith and Participation.

Home Office: OCF's staff office facility located in Englewood, Colo.

Hospitality Home: Member home that is open to visitors for coffee, meals, or overnight stays.

Lay: Non-clergy members of a chapel or local church (laity).

Lay-indigenous: A term referring to the unique nature of OCF, of impacting the military community for Christ. Rather than ordained ministers, or those staffed by OCF, it's a calling primarily undertaken by those within the military community.

Lay-led: Activities led by non-clergy members, which can be in support of the chaplaincy.

Leader (Local Leader, ROTC Leader, etc.): Member who facilitates the gathering of a local fellowship that is distinctly OCF in membership, training, context, or regular announcements. Co-leaders help ensure continuity for the sake of regular gatherings. This term will have a prefix added to it such as Local, Prayer, ROTC, etc.

Lifetime (...for a Lifetime): Continued participation and ministry as an OCF member beyond the years of serving our nation in uniform.

Maranatha Mansion: OCF-owned USNA ministry house, property, and staff residence.

Member: Term applying to both Regular and Associate Members who have signed Statements of Faith and Participation and are living lives consistent with Biblical guidelines.

Mentor: A Christ-following member who intentionally shares his or her knowledge, experience, and wisdom with a mentee or protégé who desires and pursues spiritual maturity.

PEAK (Purpose, Excellence, Authentic, and Koinonia): Spring Canyon's yearlong discipleship program for young adults (ages 18-24) that integrates spiritual growth, vocational experience, and ownership of beliefs and actions.

Pillars: Pillars express essential OCF traits. They are declarations of what OCF is known for doing, a summary of OCF priorities, and a help for staying focused within the military community.

Pray-Discover-Obey (PDO): OCF's longstanding, intentional method of 1) coming before God in prayer; 2) working with fellow believers on how to move forward in a decision-making process; and 3) establishing a methodology for doing what was decided upon/agreed to.

Region: Ministry effort bound by OCF staff to describe oversight of member-leaders. Regions may be described by military footprint, coordinator capacity, geography, or ministry potential, and may encompass multiple Areas.

Regular Member: Present and former officers or warrant officers of the Armed Forces of the United States and anyone training for such commissions who subscribe to the Statements of Faith and Participation (defined by OCF Constitution).

Rocky Mountain High (RMH): Spring Canyon's outdoor mentoring program for cadets, midshipmen, and junior officers; focus is on leadership training for integrated Christian living.

Shepherd's Fold: OCF-owned USCGA ministry house, property, and staff residence.

Spring Canyon (SC): OCF's western conference center near Buena Vista, Colo.

Support Staff: OCF employees who are selected by the Executive Director, needing no Council approval (defined by OCF Constitution), and who execute ministry roles both inside and outside the Home Office.

Summer Celebration: Spring Canyon's series of weeklong retreats featuring programs for the whole family.

Summer R&R (Rest & Recuperation): White Sulphur Springs' series of weeklong retreats featuring programs for the whole family.

Uniformed Serving Member: OCF members currently in uniform: active duty, reserve, and guard.

White Sulphur Springs (WSS): OCF's eastern conference center in Manns Choice, Pa.

CHECKLISTS & QUICK START GUIDES

A: Pray-Discover-Obey (PDO)

BEFORE THE PDO

1. Spiritually prep yourself
2. Set PDO date and time
3. Consider fasting
4. Draft topics and categories (come prepared)
5. Invite participants

DURING THE PDO

1. “PRAY” phase can include song and/or Scripture
2. Tell the group your “DISCOVER” phase methodology
 - a. How you will move through topics
 - b. Pray before/during/after topics
 - c. There are no bad ideas ... really
 - d. Practice being quiet, seek input
 - e. Take notes—key points and thoughts
 - f. Address contingencies (what if someone deploys, gets sick, etc.)
3. Develop an objective or goal for each decision you make
4. End in song, prayer, and/or Scripture

AFTER THE PDO

1. The “OBEY” phase means to do what you agreed to do, using God’s resources to do His work.
2. Ask for help to stay on course. Ask others to pray for you. Consider who might help you obey and persevere (someone nearby or a friend from afar).
3. Repeat the PDO process as needed (at least annually).
 - a. At start of semester
 - b. Before PCS season
 - c. Review plans, goals, and what done to this point; update as needed

POSSIBLE PDO GROUP TOPICS TO CONSIDER:

- When, where, what time to meet
- What to study and the format to use
- Food, music/song, games, etc.
- Child care and participation of children
- Order of events, e.g., prayer, study, then fellowship
- What you will name your group (to advertise)
- Chaplaincy coordination
- How to make the group visible (social media, in-briefs, etc.)
- Administrative: how to coordinate, synchronize the group, who will do it
- Who will update the OCF website Directory listing for the group (ocfusa.org)
- Leadership during TDY/TADs or deployments
- Transitions and handoffs during PCS season

POTENTIAL FAMILY/PERSONAL PDO CATEGORIES FOR PRAYER AND DISCUSSION:

- Spiritual growth: personal and family
- Hospitality, community engagement
- Church roles, service opportunities
- Education: adults and children
- Vacation, travel plans
- Finances: budget, tithes, offerings, etc.
- Fitness and dietary health
- Property, resource stewardship
- Assignment, job prioritization
- Stay in or transition out of the military

B: OCF When You PCS or Go TDY/TAD

TDY/TAD (stay in fellowship, encourage the local OCF body and chaplain staff, and extend your family in Christ)

1. Check OCF Directory for a visible OCF member (**ocfusa.org/directory**)
 - a. Send email/message to establish communications (video app can provide personal touch).
 - b. Is there a Bible study group meeting that you can join? Get the details.
 - c. Do you need a ride to fellowship, worship, or another event? Be sure to ask.
 - d. Share your anticipated arrival/departure plans. Share your number for text updates.
2. Contact the local chaplain office (**www.basedirectory.com** usually has phone number).
 - a. Make an appointment. Try to meet with any chaplain who is available.
 - b. Ask about Christian fellowship or chapel activities.
3. Pack gift/memorabilia to share that is unique to your unit/home.
4. Make contact once you arrive on location.
 - a. OCF members: Arrange/confirm when you will meet the local OCF individual/body.
 - b. Chaplain Office: Visit and encourage the local chaplain(s) and staff.
5. Persevere. Don't give up quickly if you don't reach someone the first time—try, try, try again.

Deployment (keep Christian fellowship, encourage military believers, grow in Christian witness to impact lives, encourage the chaplains/staff located with you, and meet new Christian family members)

1. Check the OCF Directory for info. Call the OCF Home Office (**800 424-1984**) for additional insight.
2. Send an email to **contact@ocfusa.org** to share your unclassified deployment dates and location. Ask for any insight that would help you

while deployed and be sure to share any prayer requests as well.

3. Pack primary Bible (bring color pencils for highlighting) and load software that will help personal study.
4. Seek out accountability/prayer person or team. Who will stay in touch with you while deployed?
5. Conduct a PDO with friend, spouse, or family about how to use time (and anyone at home).
6. Develop a worship plan. How will you work hard for 6 days and enter rest in a rhythm?
7. Plan to write real cards or letters. Pack cards, stationery, and envelopes.
8. Pack a spare Bible or two that you can give to someone who needs one.
9. Bring a copy of the OCF Handbook and a “100 Days Bible Study” to work through daily.

Permanent Change of Station (PCS) (review TDY/TAD and deployment considerations, plus the following items)

1. Ask your local church or chapel to “send you.” Go with their blessing to minister anew.
 - a. Ask whether your pastoral staff will send a letter of transfer/introduction once you settle in a new church. This might enable a faster integration with the new body.
2. Draft cards of appreciation and small gifts of thanks for those who impacted you over the last several years.
3. Get contact info from those you want to stay in touch with. Take pictures!
4. Make prayer cards to remember to pray for those you are leaving.

C: Starting an OCF Fellowship

1. Use the Pray-Discover-Obey process to initiate an OCF fellowship.
 - a. Search the OCF Directory for fellow OCFers in the area (**ocfusa.org/directory**).
 - b. Ask the OCF Home Office about who is nearby.
 - c. Ask God for wisdom, help, and partners so that you don't work in your own strength. Once convinced that you should start an OCF gathering, pray about who to invite, what to study, when to meet, and where to meet.
 - d. Review OCF's Purpose, Mission, and Pillars to remind yourself of why we gather in regular prayer, Bible study, and life-on-life conversations.
2. Find a co-laborer. It may be your spouse, a friend, or another couple.
 - a. Workplace study: Seek out a like-minded Christian co-worker.
 - b. If you find no one locally, then recruit a friend or OCF member to join you using video, or similar technology, so that you can pray and plan together.
3. Coordinate with the chaplain(s) and local church.
 - a. Seek their counsel, let them know your vision, ask for help advertising the group, or simply give them your contact information to share with those who might be looking for a Bible study. Ask how they would like to be kept informed as the weeks and months unfold.
 - b. Share your thoughts and vision with your local church leadership. Seek their prayerful support.
4. Invite initial participants. Be visible to those you hope to join you.
 - a. Write down names for personal invitations.
 - b. Use a group text, email, or social media message.
 - c. Make yourself visible on the OCF Directory (Use the "List Me" form at **ocfusa.org/list-me**).
 - d. Use various skills and abilities. Ask for help with social/fun event coordinator, musician, administrative email/messaging person, child care coordinator, or social media person.
 - e. Seek a consistent meeting location such as a house, chapel, or church central to where people live.

5. Prepare. The core element of the OCF small group is the study of the Bible.
 - a. Prepare your heart, your mind, and your meeting location. Maximize prior personal study and prayer.
6. Rest. OCF fellowship is about God's work through faithful stewards.
 - a. Learn to be still in your heart and rejoice in what God is doing. He will accomplish His work through your faithful preparation and execution.
 - b. Guard against your own perception of success or failure. Your identity is as a securely loved and accepted son or daughter of God.
7. Learn from the gathering.
 - a. Ask about effectiveness, focus, and purpose every quarter or so.
 - b. Discuss meeting location, time, durations, child care, food, etc. using a short PDO-type format.
8. Consider when to multiply. OCF groups with uniformed personnel can accept larger-than-normal group size because exercises, field operations, TDY/TADs, and deployments may cause unpredictable attendance. Stable groups that grow can be ready to multiply and expand their outreach by meeting in different neighborhoods or on different days/times of the week.

D: Hosting & Leading a Bible Study

BIBLE PREPARATION

1. Pray-Discover-Obey: Have you recently done an OCF group PDO?
 - a. Yes: Great, that will help you stay the course through challenging times.
 - b. No: See Pray-Discover-Obey chapter and plan for periodic PDOs to stay on track.
2. Pray for your study prep and for those who will join you.
3. Prepare ahead of time—give time for the Scriptures to marinate in your mind and spirit.
 - a. Read the passage(s) in several different translations (NASB, ESV, CSB, NKJV, etc.). Note variances.
 - b. Pick a key verse or two to memorize (meditate on the Scripture). Work on it daily.
 - c. Review the setting/context of the Scripture.
 - d. Ask what does it say (objectively and by implication)? What does it mean?
 - e. What do you not understand? Use commentaries, dictionaries, word searches, etc.
4. Draft open-ended questions to guide the discussion.
5. Consider what obedience and application might be wrestled with by the group.

LOCATION PREPARATION

1. Sitting area: clean, arranged for participation (face-to-face sharing)
2. Bathroom(s): clean and stocked
3. Beverages and food: hot/cold, plates, bowls, cups, silverware, napkins, trashcan, etc.
4. Lighting: from parking area to door (how will new arrivals find you, the right entrance, etc.?)
5. Extra paper, pens, Bibles
6. Child safety and welcome: make area ready and put toys/activities out
 - a. Plan to communicate boundaries, expectations, and collect funds if costs are shared.

FACILITATING THE BIBLE STUDY

1. Introductions: maybe ask a short-answer, “get-to-know-one-another” question
 - a. If someone is joining remotely, do a comms check.
2. Prayer: give instructions—who will start/end, not going in a circle, etc.
 - a. Make notes to help you remember prayer requests.
3. Into the Word: provide brief context or overview of the text
4. Lead group through observation, interpretation, application of text
 - a. Ask open-ended questions, allow silence, and listen to input actively.
 - b. Guide enough to work through text (consider whether side trails seem beneficial as you focus on main Scripture).
5. End on time, but make at least one “OCF family” announcement
 - a. Announce upcoming retreat or summer program or work project, comment on an OCF article or Crosspoint podcast episode, give update on chaplains/chapel program, etc.
 - b. Invite group to stay for fellowship or to depart, and announce next week’s details.
 - c. Ensure TDY/TAD guests have rides to Sunday worship or other activities.

E: Chaplaincy Support

1. Learn the name of your chaplain(s). Supporting the chaplaincy means caring about every chaplain who is serving for the free exercise of religion ... regardless of their endorsing body or background.
2. Make an appointment to meet with at least one chaplain a month.
 - a. Follow up with other chaplains as time allows.
 - b. Get to know every chaplain you might reasonably work with or see.
3. Note the vision/goal of the chaplain team. Learn their focus.
 - a. Discover their needs and where do they want help.
 - b. Listen for how to pray for them.
 - c. Note the name(s) of any on the chaplain team whom you meet.
 - d. Learn about any special skill sets or training of the chaplains.
4. Invite your chaplain/team to your unit, workspace, etc. Make them welcome.
 - a. Introduce them to peers, subordinates, and superiors.
5. Pray for your chaplain, their team, their family, etc.
6. Make regular visits to your chaplain. Become a friend.
7. Invite them to your home, to a meal out, to your Bible study, etc.
8. Plan for them to sit with you during mandatory events, dinners, or socials.
9. Once you know the chaplains, try to recommend the right chaplain for those in need.
10. Take a snack, a drink, or other item to your chaplain. Show that you love them.
11. Remember the civilians and contractors who support the chaplaincy's work. Learn their names, demonstrate love to them, and encourage them.
12. If appropriate, volunteer to be part of advisory-type councils or committees. Bear your influence wisely.

F: Christian Mentoring

1. Pray for a mentor/mentee. Write down your thoughts while praying.
 - a. Who might you be seeking, desiring to spend time with?
2. Take action by texting, emailing, calling, or paying a visit to a potential mentor/mentee.
3. Have an initial meeting to determine suitability, desire, and focus.
 - a. It is OK to ask, spend time in prayer, and then decide the fit is not good.
 - b. If a mentoring fit appears good, swap complete contact info.
4. Once there is agreement to meet, pray about next steps.
 - a. Focus of the relationship
 - b. Frequency of meeting
 - c. Length of each visit
 - d. Contingencies if TDY/TADs or deployments come up
 - e. Mentoring Relationship Duration (how many months will you plan to meet?)
5. Take time to get to know one another. Share your testimonies, stories, vision, etc.
6. Draft topics for the first 6-10 meetings. Stay Scripture based.
 - a. Christian mentoring places the mentoring relationship within the context of integrating faith and military profession.
7. Put a date on the calendar about when to assess to continue/stop.
8. Stay safe. Be transparent. Guard the relationship, the information, and the person.
9. Stay in touch. Short texts are OK.
 - a. Pray for one another daily, communicate weekly, meet at least monthly.

Notes

Notes

Notes

Notes

Notes