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Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries

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The history and development of the Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries Department is a complex stream having multiple tributaries stemming back to the very beginning of the denomination.¹ Adventist chaplains have served at schools, hospitals, prisons, through multiple wars, government, industry, and community agencies. Chaplains comprise the largest Adventist clergy community interface group of the church.

Beginnings of Chaplaincy in Adventist Health Care and Educational Settings

In the 1880s, the number of both health-care institutions and church-related higher education facilities was growing. At that time, Adventist ministers were assigned to campuses to teach theology, provide spiritual guidance, and lead campus religious activities. They were forerunners of today's more clearly defined campus chaplaincies in both denominational and secular college settings. These ministers were called chaplains, a designation that was more honorary than professional. They did not have the specific professional training opportunities available to modern chaplains.

As far back as the 1880s, minutes of the General Conference Committee record the appointment of ministers to be chaplains within the developing Adventist hospitals and sanitariums. Ministers were selected to serve the spiritual needs of both the staff and guests. The spiritual elements of Adventist health centers were central to the whole operation. Chaplains were deemed essential.²

In 1909, the General Conference Committee discussed the spiritual interests of the sanitariums on October 7. A few days later, a committee recommendation was adopted that affirmed health-care chaplaincy as part of the mission of the church. It further directed that all levels of church leadership work with church-related health-care institutions to secure and fund services of qualified ministers to do the work of chaplains.³

The first health-care chaplain, Lycurgus McCoy, served at the Battle Creek Sanitarium from 1888 to 1913 (with a break of two years). McCoy had served as a second lieutenant in the Federal Army in the Civil War before his chaplaincy at Battle Creek. During his hospital chaplaincy, he also served as chaplain to the local Grand Army of the Republic organization.

Out of the denomination's health-care ministry has grown today's health-care chaplaincy in acute care hospitals, clinics, home care agencies, hospice care, and other medical settings. Health-care chaplains constitute the denomination's largest specialized ministry, with men and women serving as chaplains in Adventist facilities and other private and government health-care institutions around the world.

Key developments in the professional growth of Adventist health-care chaplaincy included a growing number of chaplains taking Clinical Pastoral Education and affiliating with groups such as the Association of Professional Chaplains, as well as the church's own ecclesiastical endorsement process. More recently, the Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries Institute was established.

Military Issues and Concerns for the Early Adventist Church

Much of the early development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church coincided with the American Civil War. As church pioneers were dealing with many issues of theology and organization, they suddenly were faced with the economic and theological issues surrounding military conscription of church members. Theologically, many were opposed to military service because it involved both killing and Sabbath issues. Conscription and draft laws provided for those unwilling to serve to pay a commutation fee of \$300 so that someone else could take their place. Depending on inflation rates, that fee would be more than US\$5,000 in 2020 dollars to exempt each person. The pressure on small congregations was obvious. It got even worse. In July 1865, the commutation fee was dropped, and in its place was a law that said if you refused to serve, you would lose citizenship.

In 1864, church leaders saw that if the new denomination went on record as teaching conscientious objection and the government recognized that as a valid denominational position, church members would not have to pay the commutation fee but would be drafted and allowed to serve in noncombatant roles in the military. On August 2 of that year, the church formally made such an appeal, and the next day, Governor Blair of Michigan granted recognition of the request. Other states followed suit, and on September 1, the office of the Provost Martial of the United States made the results official for all states.

While there were no Adventist chaplains in the U.S. military at that time, it became apparent that wars would continue and that church members would be caught up in the governmental needs for soldiers and for chaplains to serve those soldiers.

There was no thought during World War I that Adventists would serve as military chaplains. The only chaplains the church had were ministers assigned to schools as Bible teachers and in hospitals. Most of these clergy members had no formal chaplaincy training. They were assigned to their duties much as any pastor was assigned to a church.

Following World War I, E. N. Dick, professor of history at Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska, who had served in World War I and personally seen the need for Adventists to be prepared for a future draft, began the Medical Cadet Corps (M.C.C.) training.⁶ M.C.C. offered paramilitary training in military drill and ceremony, marching, and first-aid. The concept was picked up and expanded at the Adventist medical school in Loma Linda, California. In 1939 the Medical Cadet Corps training and concept was endorsed by the General Conference. It continued operation until the end of the draft in the United States in 1973. After the end of the draft, M.C.C. activities dwindled to only a few groups.

The M.C.C. focused on preparing Adventist young people for service if they were drafted. If they were trained in basic medical skills, their opportunities were enhanced to serve as medics. This would solve both the weapons and Sabbath-keeping challenges for Adventist soldiers. However, there were no Seventh-day Adventist military chaplains, even though members of the church were in the military.

Military Chaplaincy Begins in the Adventist Church

On May 20, 1943, the Spring Council discouraged ministers from accepting a commission as a military chaplain. The record of the meeting minutes says,

because it involves a violation of the principles governing the separation of church and state, and for other reasons suggested, the General Conference Committee is seeking in these actions to guide Seventh-day Adventist ministers away from the acceptance of military commissions as chaplains.⁷

Not long after, a General Conference Committee voted to rescind that action and leave it up to the conscience of the individual as to whether or not they would apply for or accept a commission as a military chaplain. At that time, the church would not officially endorse military chaplains but would allow them to enter the military without church approval or censure.

In the April 1944 GCC minutes, it says that

some of our ministers who have had sincere convictions that they should go into the military services as chaplains, have refrained from applying for a chaplaincy, feeling that if they did so, on the basis of this statement in the action of May 20 they would be under denominational censure as having violated a principle of the denomination.⁸

This clearly states that some ministers felt they would be under denominational censure, not that the denomination was censuring those who followed their convictions. As a result, the GCC rescinded the statement of explanation “in order that all may understand that no man is placed under denominational censure for following his individual convictions in this matter.”⁹

At the 1950 General Conference Session, William H. Bergherm was elected to serve as secretary of the International Commission for Medical Cadet Service of the General Conference, which was later renamed International Service Commission. He served in that department from 1950 to 1958.¹⁰ Bergherm, who had served six years as a U.S. Army chaplain from 1943 to 1950, worked with one of the first Adventist pastors who was finishing the bachelor of divinity degree at the seminary. That student was interested in becoming an Army chaplain. The church agreed, and Horace Walsh became the first Seventh-day Adventist—ordained and endorsed Army chaplain. This was agreed to by Carlyle B. Haynes, the newly reelected War Service Commission secretary of the General Conference.¹¹

At the 1954 General Conference Session, the name of the church agency dealing with military affairs was changed to the National Service Organization. The focus was still on religious accommodation issues primarily for North American Division military members and the ongoing operation of the Medical Cadet Corps. Health-care chaplains were approved by local conferences and unions.

By 1956, seven Adventist chaplains had been endorsed by the church and were on active duty in various branches of the U.S. military. This was a reversal from the 1943 recommendation for Adventist clergy not to serve as military chaplains.

In 1958, the National Service Organization was attached as part of the Young Peoples Missionary Volunteer department, which was what the youth department of the General Conference was then called.¹² M.C.C. was officially carried out through youth ministries. Other Adventist chaplaincies, while recognized and appreciated, had no linkage to the upper leadership of the church organization. In 1965, a total of 14 Adventist military chaplains were on active duty in the U.S. military.¹³

Expansion of Professional Chaplaincies and a New General Conference Department

In 1971, at the annual military chaplains meeting held at Andrews University, the military chaplains suggested that

health-care and campus chaplains become part of an umbrella agency, named Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries, that would give all Adventist chaplains endorsements and official access to the leaders of the North American Division and General Conference. Up to that time, only the church's military chaplains, one Veteran's Administration chaplain, and one federal prison chaplain enjoyed that level of connection. The health-care and campus chaplains were only loosely linked as groups, many of them connected more directly to their local locations and employers. There was no centralized endorsement protocol in place within the church for chaplains in fields other than the military. All federal-level chaplains required endorsement from a specific endorsing agency of the church.¹⁴

Health-care chaplains in the western regions had begun to organize in the 1950s, and their group became the Seventh-day Adventist Healthcare Chaplains Association, which operated under the umbrella of the Seventh-day Adventist Hospital Association. While church leaders often attended the annual meetings, there was no direct link to church leadership in general. Health-care chaplaincy continued developing as a specific clergy career field, including specialized training in Clinical Pastoral Education.¹⁵

Charles Martin and Clarence "Bud" Bracebridge had begun to develop protocols and applications to bring endorsement processes together as a logical progression to meet the needs of an expanding group of Adventist chaplains serving in other than Adventist institutions. The earlier approval from local church leaders was no longer adequate.¹⁶

Annual Council in October of 1981 incorporated endorsement to Military, Veteran's Administration, government/private hospitals, prisons, etc.¹⁷ Thus, recognition of a wider range of chaplain endorsement began to take place. The National Service Organization began to officially incorporate and endorse more than just military chaplains, although the name of the organization did not adequately describe its scope.

The 1983 Annual Council mandated Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries " 'to incorporate the present functions and services of the National Service Organization (NSO)' and to coordinate 'chaplaincy services for the NSO, military/VA, health-care institutions, prisons, campuses, and other related areas served by chaplains both in and beyond the Seventh-day Adventist Church.' "¹⁸

The 1985 General Conference session voted Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries as a General Conference service. This action allowed Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries to respond to requests for assistance from other geographic parts of the church organization as those world fields began to incorporate chaplaincies into their areas but did not allow for formal departments to be developed within those divisions' territories.¹⁹

A Pivotal Point for Chaplaincy Ministries

Before Clarence "Bud" Bracebridge was elected as Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries director in 1988, no one who headed the department had ever served as a chaplain. Up to this point, with the sole exception of Bergherm, all directors and officers for the various agencies that had dealt with chaplains had come to leadership through youth ministries backgrounds. Bracebridge brought in Martin Feldbush, a seasoned, board-certified hospital chaplain and former president of the Seventh-day Adventist Healthcare Chaplains Association, as his associate in 1989. This marked a pivotal point for the department and future development. Bracebridge and Feldbush worked to professionalize all fields of chaplaincy to meet the ever-increasing professional entry levels for chaplains.

Dick Stenbakken replaced Bracebridge in 1992.²⁰ Stenbakken was the first director of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries who had been a career military chaplain. Stenbakken's service as a colonel in the Army had included multiple military leadership roles, including service at the Army's Chief of Chaplains' office. His leadership added another layer of professional experience and expertise to the department.

At the General Conference Session in 1995, Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries was designated as a full department of the church,²¹ thus mandating Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries leaders in all global divisions of the church. This set in motion changes for education, expansion, and further globalization and professionalism for all Adventist chaplains.

Martin Feldbush, after a number of years as associate director, became ACM director in 2004.²² He came to ACM with the benefit of an extensive background in hospital chaplaincy and spiritual care leadership in Adventist healthcare. Gary Councell,²³ a former U.S. Army chaplain (colonel) was his associate director and had a background similar to that of Stenbakken's in terms of leadership skills that would benefit ACM. Together Feldbush and Councell began rigorous policy development that laid the foundation for further globalization of professional Adventist chaplaincy. A theme of this period was expansion of training and ecclesiastical endorsement for chaplains in the divisions, and training for ACM division and union leaders. The goal was to develop a global system of Adventist chaplaincy. During this era Feldbush also promoted the concept of an institute for training of Adventist chaplains. The institute was envisioned as an organization that would provide onsite, online and distance education options. Among other developments, its initial stages featured a collaboration between Kettering Medical Center, Kettering, Ohio, U.S.A., and Manila Adventist Medical Center in the Philippines to provide Clinical Pastoral Education in Manila. This program has grown into what is probably the premiere Clinical Pastoral Education program in the region. Under the leadership of Mario Ceballos, the envisioned 'institute' has further grown into what is now the successful Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries Institute.

Expanding Globalization

Gary Councill took departmental leadership in 2008 with Mario Ceballos, a former board-certified health-care chaplain who was also a U.S. Navy reserve chaplain, as the associate director.²⁴ Together, they began planning to train chaplains using Clinical Pastoral Education as a worldwide model. This would provide needed additional skills to areas of the world church where such training had never been made available before.

Up to 2014, the officers of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries had covered both the North American Division and the world field. As divisions beyond North America began to expand and widen the varieties of chaplaincies, Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries divided. In 2014 Mario Ceballos became the General Conference Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries director²⁵ while former U.S. Navy Chaplain Paul Anderson served as the director of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministry for the North American Division.²⁶ Anderson, who retired from serving as a U.S. Navy chaplain, brought a wide range of experience, including chief diversity officer, educational services officer, and medical ethicist at three major military hospitals.

Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries sponsored international training, and Clinical Pastoral Education expanded exponentially throughout Asia, Africa, and South America.

The multiple strands that ultimately were woven together to form Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries had early beginnings in health care and education. As military chaplains began to serve, it became necessary to have government and denominational recognition of endorsement for Adventist military chaplains. The next steps were to link endorsement and recognition for all chaplains. That required an expanded look at both the process and product, which ultimately led to the development of the Adventist Chaplaincy departments of both the General Conference and the various divisions of the worldwide church.

The organization that grew into the Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries department began in the youth department as a way to assist military members. In that era, while there were civilian chaplains and military retreat centers, there were no formally endorsed chaplains in any of the various disciplines. The first Adventist military chaplains in the North American Division were allowed, but not endorsed by the church.

Bud Bracebridge's leadership proved pivotal as he brought in to the department chaplains who had actually been deeply involved in chaplaincy, both military and health care. Since that time, one of the Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries departmental leaders has always had a lengthy career as a professional health-care chaplain, and another department member has had extensive experience in the military. A General Conference Working Policy voted in 2013 mandates that any leader or associate in the Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries department must have both official church endorsement and a minimum of five years of full-time employment as a professional chaplain before they would be eligible to assume a leadership role in the Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries department on the GC and division levels.

The strands of healthcare, military, church-related campus, public campus, government, Veteran's Administration, federal and state corrections, and community-based volunteer chaplain ministries now flow together and find support and official denominational recognition through the Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries departments of the General Conference and all divisions throughout the worldwide church.

The volunteer and community-based chaplaincies include endorsement for service in health care, Civil Air Patrol, disaster response, and other agencies.

Adventist Chaplain Statistics

In 2020, more than 700 professionals endorsed as Seventh-day Adventist chaplains were serving in health care, military, campus, correctional, industrial, and other settings within the North American Division.²⁷ Professional chaplaincy is rapidly expanding in all divisions of the world church under the supervision and mentoring of the Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries department.

Role and Place of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries in the World Church and Its Mission

The Great Commission of Matthew 28:19, 20 challenges believers to spread the gospel, make disciples, baptize, and teach as a testimony to all nations before the end of time (Matthew 24:14).

Adventist chaplains fulfill that mission in unique and diverse institutional settings. Those settings have their own rules, guidelines, history, customs, dress, and language. Chaplains enter into those institutions as part of the institution to minister to both the institution and those who are there. Someone attempting to do ministry from outside the institution would be greatly disadvantaged even if allowed to attempt ministering there.

The ministry of institutional chaplains is *expected and welcomed* by both those who run the institution and those in the institution. Ministers from outside of the institution could be blocked or ignored.

Chaplaincy is a fully incarnational ministry, mirroring the ministry of Christ who came to be One with us and One among us. Chaplains minister where others cannot go or will not go. As such, they bring the face of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to places and people who would otherwise have little chance of any contact with Seventh-day Adventist thought or practices.

Seventh-day Adventist chaplains serve Adventist members wherever they are, and at the same time, serve people of various, or no, religious backgrounds. The Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries department exists to assist, train, and empower Adventist chaplains serving as part of Christ's incarnational ministry.

Leaders and Department Names²⁸

Organization Names and Directors

War Service Commission: C. B. Haynes (1940–1946); W. H. Branson (1946); W. B. Ochs (1946–1953).

War Service and Industrial Relations: C. B. Haynes (1953–1954).

National Service Organization (War Service Commission): G. W. Chambers (1955–1956).

National Service Organization: A. V. Olson (1957–1958).

National Service Organization (Youth Dept.): J. R. Nelson (1959); Clark Smith (1959–1983).

National Service Organization: Charles Martin (1983–1985).

Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries as a General Conference Service, 1985²⁹

Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries: Charles Martin (1985–1988); Clarence Bracebridge (1988–1991); Martin Feldbush, acting director (1991–1992); Dick Stenbakken (1992–2004).

Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries as a General Conference Department, 1995³⁰

Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries: Martin Feldbush (2004–2008); Gary Councell (2008–2014); Mario Ceballos (2014–2015).

Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries splits into General Conference and North American Division Departments

Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries, GC: Mario Ceballos (2015–).

Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries, NAD: Paul Anderson (2015–).

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"Ninth Business Meeting," *General Conference Bulletin*, July 6, 1995.

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NOTES

1. It should be noted that the limited scope of this article focuses primarily on the entities and actions directly linked to the development of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries (ACM) at the General Conference level. The article acknowledges, but does not detail, the reality that chaplaincy was concurrently developing in several divisions of the world church. When Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries became a General Conference department in 2015, specialized chaplaincy ministries were already established and operating in some other divisions. This allowed the new department an immediate global base of connections, interests, and ministry.?
2. D. A. Robinson, I. D. Van Horn, and H. S. Lay, "Health Reform Institute Proceedings," *ARH*, January 11, 1887, 13. General Conference

Committee minutes,

<https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/Forms/AllItems.aspx?RootFolder=%2fMinutes%2fGCC&FolderCTID=0x012000F14CCE0E47CC244BB8EA93FE79A8-4C29-98A2-A8A53EA749B0>).

3. Minutes of the General Conference Committee, October 7, 1909 and October 10, 1909, General Conference Archives, accessed September 22, 2020, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1909.pdf>?
4. A. B. Olsen, "Lycurgus McCoy obituary," *ARH*, August 6, 1925, 22.?
5. *Ibid.*?
6. "Attention! Young Men and Parents of Young Men," *Central Union Reaper*, May 12, 1964, 2.?
7. "Minutes of Meetings of the General Conference Committee, May 3-30, 1943," p. 952, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1943-05.pdf>?
8. Spring Meeting, April 10-16, 1944," General Conference Committee, April 16, 1944, 1376, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1944-04-SM.pdf>?
9. *Ibid.*?
10. Seventh-day Adventist yearbooks, 1951–1958.?
11. Walsh was commissioned as a First Lieutenant in the Army January 1, 1951, and went on active duty February 5, 1951, at Ft. Meade, Maryland. He was ordained while at the Seminary preparing to go on active duty. The ordination was arranged by the GC President W. H. Branson and the Secretary of the International Service Commission of the General Conference W. H. Bergherm (Robert L. Mole, *He Called Some to be Chaplains Volume I* [Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1982], 118).?
12. "National Service Organization," *Yearbook of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1959), 17.?
13. Dick Stenbakken, personal knowledge as ACM director from 1992 to 2004.?
14. *Ibid.*?
15. *Ibid.*?
16. *Ibid.*?
17. John Umeda was the first Veterans Administration chaplain endorsed by the Adventist Church. Walter Horton was the first Federal Prisons Chaplain endorsed by the Adventist Church. Umeda and Horton met with the military chaplains when ACM met. Later, as the VA, Healthcare, and Correctional groups formed, Umeda and Horton collaborated with them. For years, they were part of the military chaplains meetings (Dick Stenbakken, personal knowledge as ACM director from 1992 to 2004).?
18. Charles D. Martin, "Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries," *Ministry*, December 1984, <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1984/12/adventist-chaplaincy-ministries>?
19. "Organization," Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries, accessed September 10, 2020, <https://www.adventistchaplains.org/index.php/about-acm/organization/>?
20. Dick Stenbakken, personal knowledge as director of ACM from 1992 to 2004.?
21. "Ninth Business Meeting," *General Conference Bulletin*, July 6, 1995, 23.?
22. "Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Silver Spring, Md.: Office of Archives and Statistics, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), 22.?
23. *Ibid.*?
24. "Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Silver Spring, Md.: Office of Archives and Statistics, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2009), 22.?
25. "Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries," *Yearbook* (Silver Spring, Md.: Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, 2015), 24.?
26. *Ibid.*, 184.?
27. Provided by ACM.?
28. Seventh-day Adventist yearbooks, 1940–2020, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/>?
29. Charles Martin was the director from 1983 to 1988. During his tenure, Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries became a service of the General

Conference. It was voted at the General Conference Session in 1985. The 1985 date only marks the new designation as a service, not a change of leadership.?

30. Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries became a department in 1995 at the General Conference Session. Dick Stenbakken was director from 1992 to 2004. The event in 1995 marked a new designation for Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries as a department (rather than a service). There was no change of leadership at that time.?

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