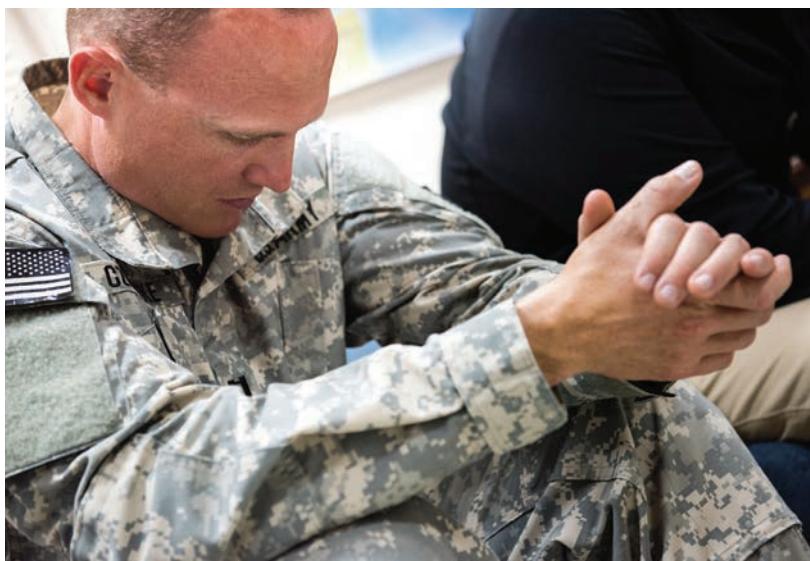


# Christ for Veterans and Their Families

By Chaplain Craig Muehler, Director,  
LCMS Ministry to the Armed Forces,  
with Cheri Fish, Mission Editor



Christie Steffans, LWML Missouri District President, presents a check for \$27,750 to LCMS Ministry to the Armed Forces Chaplain Craig Muehler, director.

We are so grateful for the Lutheran Women's Missionary League and its commitment and outreach to all military-connected people. Because of LWML's faithful mite offerings, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's Ministry to the Armed Forces was able to hold a National Operation Barnabas conference, "Christ for Veterans and Their Families," in St. Louis on March 15 and 16, 2018.

The purpose of the conference was to share ideas, promote networking, and expand Operation Barnabas ministries into more congregations and

districts. Participants represented 20 LCMS districts as well as LWML members working in their congregations. The benefit will grow as participants return home and share with others how we can better care for and support these special people. Just as Barnabas was St. Paul's supportive companion on his missionary journeys, Operation Barnabas offers resources to help congregations care for all military-connected people — within their congregations and out in their communities — through intentional outreach.

About 330 of the Synod's 6,000 congregations are active in the 10-year-old Operation Barnabas program. We would like to see every Synod congregation involved in sharing the veteran-friendly message: "Your service to our nation was honorable, you did your duty and we respect that, you're welcome here — no matter what you've been through — and God loves you and sent Jesus for you."

One of the main speakers was Lt. Gen. Rick Lynch (U.S. Army, retired), an LCMS Lutheran who wasn't baptized until he was 32. Lynch, author of *Work Hard, Pray Hard: The Power of Faith in Action*, spoke of his journey from a religion-free upbringing to his military service to actively sharing his faith in Jesus Christ.

Angela Cook, RN, suicide prevention coordinator for the St. Louis Veterans Administration Medical Center, shared a resounding theme: "Suicide prevention is everybody's business." If someone only took the time to listen to a hurting veteran — "and that person could be you . . . just caring is very important" — more lives might be saved, she said. Cook shared statistics pertaining to the United States: suicide is the 10th leading cause of death; someone attempts suicide every 35 seconds; and veterans account for 18 percent (some 20 per day) of the 42,000 deaths by suicide annually.

Chaplain Rev. Dr. Gary Danielsen, a retired U.S. Army Colonel, called ministries to military families and veterans a "mission field" with "tremendous opportunities for outreach." Most of those who have served in the military, particularly in combat, tend to trust and confide most readily in others who have served, Danielsen noted. "Many veterans like to tell their story, many are afraid to tell their story," and, perhaps most important, "many need to tell their story," he said.

The need to connect with those who are hurting is overwhelming. Numerous ideas to help congregations reach out with Christ to veterans and their families were shared by the Rev. Dr. Michael Morehouse, a 23-year U.S. Army veteran and pastor of Catalina Lutheran Church in Catalina, Arizona, one of the first congregations to start an Operation Barnabas ministry.

The magnitude of benefits from this conference will continue as Christ's love is shown to our military veterans and their families. We look forward to how God will work through the conference participants, reaching out with Witness, Mercy, and Life Together. [Q](#)

Photo left, courtesy of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod/Frank Kohn