



Depression and Suicide in the Military

Prayer for Our Military Chaplains

By Chaplain Steven Hokana

Almighty and ever-living God, we adore You for the gift of life through Your Son, Jesus Christ, Who came into this world and walked among us; Who, although true God, for us, became true man.

On this day we come to You with joy in our soul and thanksgiving in our heart. Look with favor on all our military chaplains, those men called to proclaim Your Law and Gospel, for repentance and life in the Armed Forces. At times their task is daunting; the challenges, at times, appear overwhelming. We ask You to pour out Your Spirit and provide strength and hope to those overwhelmed with sadness and death.

So, be with our chaplains. Abide with them who, in Your image, enter the crucible of sin, pain, and loss. Extend to them joy, knowing that God uses them and their vocation to bring about forgiveness and life and salvation through His Word and Sacraments that they share.

Through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You, and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:
1-800-273-TALK (8255), available
24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Depression

“What we see consistently boils down to loss. It can be loss of a loved one, divorce, health, loss of a limb, loss of identity,” says Chaplain Steven Hokana, Ret. Lieutenant Colonel, Assistant Director of the Ministry of Armed Forces, LCMS.

Toni Larson, Clinical Social Worker and Director of Counseling at Lutheran Family Service of Iowa, agrees. “When someone comes in with depression, one of the questions that I feel is important to ask, is ‘What losses have you experienced?’ Feeling the loss and adjusting to it can bring sadness, anxiety, loss of motivation, and direction — and many other symptoms typical of depression.”

Suicide

Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States. It’s the 2nd leading cause of death among people ages 15–24. More than 44,000 Americans die by suicide each year.

“In the military, we are at a 10-year high (rate) for suicide. A big answer, really, is bringing Jesus into it. Chaplains and spiritual leaders bring that hope that is not found anywhere else,” Craig Muehler, Director of the Ministry to the Armed Forces, LCMS, says. “Our churches for years have struggled with suicide. We do not want to glorify it, but understand the mental health behind it.”

“We need to talk about suicide, because Scripture talks about it,” Chaplain Hokana adds. If you suspect a friend or family member is depressed or suicidal, Chaplains Hokana and Muehler shared the **ACT** intervention method used in the military:

- **Ask** if they’ve thought about committing suicide. Usually they are quite forthcoming and have a sense of relief that you’re asking and willing to talk with them.
- **Care** for them; find out if they have made a plan.
- **Treat** Go with them to get professional help. Don’t leave them alone, but don’t be sworn to secrecy. Earlier treatment leads to faster recovery.

“As Christian counselors, we remind our clients that God is with us always and that He takes care of us, even if we don’t feel we can take care of ourselves,” Larson adds. “Trusting in Him, and calling upon Him, can bring comfort and reassurance in the dark recesses of the wilderness we are navigating.” *Q*