

April 27, 2010

Armed Forces Chaplain Board
Office of the Under Secretary of Defense
4000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-4000

Dear Members of the Armed Forces Chaplains Board:

Thank you for seeking input from the denominational Endorsing Agencies. As stakeholders in the issues associated with the repeal of 10 U.S.C. para 654, we are grateful for this opportunity.

Southern Baptist endorse over 1300 chaplains serving in the military chaplaincy of our Armed Forces. We have been examining the impact for some months now.

We view two issues at work if the repeal is approved by Congress.

First, open homosexuals serving in the military have far reaching consequences, not only for the military and its policies but also on the culture of the United States of America. We anticipate that the Southern Baptist Convention meeting June 15 & 16, 2010 in Orlando, FL, will vote on a resolution stating that body's disapproval of open homosexuality in the military.

Secondly, the impact of open homosexuality on the ministry of our chaplains will be significant. There are elements in the United States bent on eliminating chaplaincy from the military and all federal agencies. These elements are "looking" for a complaint or lawsuit opportunity based discrimination or a claim of "hate". Our chaplains will be forced to minister in a climate of hostility. Note item 5 in the enclosure for a discussion of the impact on the service of our chaplains in worship/pulpit ministry and in the area of counseling.

In spite of a potential climate of hostility toward our chaplains we encourage our chaplains to be as inclusive as possible and when appropriate to be exclusive. Our *Endorsement Manual for Chaplains and Counselors in Ministry* was recently amended to affirm our Chaplains Commission's expectation that our chaplains will minister to all people.

Add to Chapter IV under General Expectations of Chaplains and Counselors in Ministry.

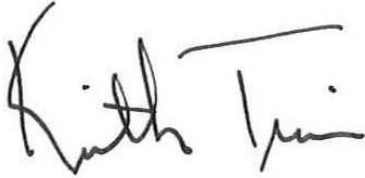
Ministry to All Persons – You are expected to minister to all persons, regardless of their behavior choices, ethnicity, physical condition/presence, or religious preference. In providing this ministry you are not condoning/approving of

behaviors the Scriptures (Holy Bible) define as sinful, for example drunkenness, fornication, homosexuality, or abortion. Rather you should be seeking to help the person recognize God's intended order for life and to understand their need to humbly acknowledge God's plan for their life. You should be as inclusive as possible for mandatory activities and appropriately exclusive in ecclesiastical function and performance.

The enclosure provides further explanation of the above statement.

As Southern Baptists we hold to the moral code of the Holy Scriptures (The Holy Bible). We value all human beings fully, as creations of God Almighty. We would not dehumanize anyone. Homosexuality is an individual's moral choice, as is drunkenness, adultery, and other behavior choices the Holy Scriptures declare as sin before God. We are all equally accountable before God for the choices we make. God expects repentance from a person who chooses sinful behavior.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Keith Travis". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line above the name.

B. Keith Travis
Chaplaincy Evangelism Team, Team Leader
North American Mission Board
Southern Baptist Convention

Enclosure: Policy Statement for Southern Baptist Endorsed Chaplains, approved 4/20/10

April 27, 2010

From: Chaplaincy Team Director
To: Endorsed Southern Baptist Chaplains

Subject: Ministry of Southern Baptist Endorsed Chaplains To All Persons

Statement: Southern Baptist endorsed chaplains are ordained pastors from local churches affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention. As such these chaplains have affirmed their belief in the authority of the Scriptures (Holy Bible), as normative for their life and that of those who receive their ministry. Furthermore, each Southern Baptist endorsed chaplain has affirmed the statements of the “Baptist Faith and Message” as adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention. Southern Baptist endorsed chaplains should never be told to refrain from preaching and teaching the “whole counsel of the Word of God” (Acts 20:27). Nor should the Southern Baptist endorsed chaplain be required to perform certain sacerdotal acts which violate their conscience as informed by the Scriptures (Holy Bible).

Discussion:

1. Southern Baptists believe that Scripture (Holy Bible) is totally true and trustworthy. The Scriptures provide God’s instruction for right living. In reference to certain behaviors, such as drunkenness, fornication, homosexuality, or abortion, the Scriptures are very clear that these activities are sinful and not a behavior that honor’s God’s creative order for life. Southern Baptists value the family unit as described in the Scriptures and teach the Scriptural doctrines of a man and woman uniting in holy matrimony. This family unit is the foundation of human society. (See the “Baptist Faith and Message,” article XVIII)
2. Southern Baptists come from a history favoring religious liberty. (See the “Baptist Faith and Message,” article XVII). Our history is replete with persecution for our religious faith and practice. Our chaplains do well in the military setting because we strongly uphold the right of freedom of religion. Southern Baptist endorsed chaplains faithfully minister to all persons placed in their care, regardless of personal history, sinful behavior or religious preferences.
3. Southern Baptists believe all people should understand that God loves them and desires that “none should perish,” -- meaning that no person should live their life without the opportunity to hear and respond to the “Good News” of God’s love in Jesus Christ. (See the “Baptist Faith and Message,” article XI)
4. Southern Baptist chaplains preach and teach the whole counsel of the Scriptures, calling people to repent of their sin and turn to Christ as Savior. (See the “Baptist Faith and Message,” article IV) As their Endorsing Agency we expect our chaplains to choose and affirm behaviors reflecting the whole counsel of the Scriptures. Sinful behavior choices or affirmation may require withdrawal of their endorsement.

5. Because of the potential official approval of open homosexual behavior choice in the military, several concerns are raised.
 - a. The First Amendment's guarantee of "free exercise of religion" and "freedom of speech" for chaplains and other military members may be harmed, abridged, curtailed and/or annulled. This is particularly a concern because of Scriptural passages recognizing homosexual behavior as sinful and the Southern Baptists' belief in the full counsel of the Scriptures.
 - b. Religious literature which declares from Scripture that homosexual behavior is sinful may be excluded from being available to military personnel and even barred from use for religious education. Bibles could even be excluded from military chapels.
 - c. The chaplain may be required to include homosexuals in marriage preparation classes or, marriage enrichment retreats/seminars, like the Army's Strong Bonds program.
 - d. Chaplains may be required to lead and/or attend "sensitivity training" about the homosexual behavior and military policy affirming the same. This requirement would be very troubling to the conscience of a Southern Baptist chaplain.

These potential situations could result in forcing Southern Baptist endorsed chaplains to compromise and therefore violate their conscience in regard to their religious belief and practice.

If the policy is changed and open homosexual behavior is approved in the military, Southern Baptist endorsed chaplains and other chaplains must be protected from potential abuses of their Constitutional rights by military policy and individual claims of discrimination or hate.

Southern Baptist chaplains would not be demonstrating the love of God if they accommodated sinful behavior by failing to preach the "full counsel of the Word of God."

References:

"Baptist Faith and Message" A statement adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention, June 14, 2000. Available at <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfm2000.asp>

"Endorsement Manual for Chaplains and Counselors in Ministry" Adopted by the Chaplain Commission, NAMB, SBC, in May 2001, and amended by the Chaplain Commission, October 7, 2008 (Chapter IV Personnel Policies of the Chaplains Commission, SBC, under Glossolalia). Available at www.namb.net/chaplain under "Required Reading for Chaplain" button.