

# CHAPLAINCY REQUIREMENTS

## Summary of Application Process and Endorsement for Chaplaincy

1. Read our Chaplaincy Requirements, consisting of two sections—Chaplaincy Ministry and Endorsement and Requirements for Endorsement.
2. Contact our assistant to the chaplain endorser. See chaplaincy personnel for her contact information.
3. Have a pre-application assessment with the chaplain endorser. The endorser will either approve you to submit an application or recommend delaying in order to satisfy certain requirements.
4. When approved, complete the online application appropriate for your interest:
  - a. Chaplain endorsement application for chaplain positions
  - b. Chaplain candidate application for students enrolled in seminary
5. The application process normally takes approximately eight weeks.

## CHAPLAINCY MINISTRY AND ENDORSEMENT

### General Information

Chaplaincy is a unique and specialized vocational ministry in which credentialed religious ministry professionals (RMP) represent their religious organizations in various institutional settings. To serve as a chaplain in most institutional settings one must have ecclesiastical endorsement (hereafter called 'endorsement') from his/her religious organization or faith group.

Converge endorses men and women as chaplains to the following entities:

1. The Department of Defense (DOD) – Army, Navy, Air Force.
2. The Veterans Affairs Administration (VA).
3. The Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) (U.S. Department of Justice).
4. Healthcare institutions (hospitals, hospice, palliative care, etc.) that require endorsement.
5. The Association of Professional Chaplains (APC) for Board Certification.

DOD, VA, BOP and APC have authorized the Baptist General Conference (Converge) to endorse qualified RMPs as chaplains. Each has standards for chaplaincy that may include citizenship, educational requirements, specialized training, age limitations, National Agency Background Check (criminal and credit), fitness requirements and medical requirements. These agencies defer to religious organizations to establish ministerial requirements and ecclesiastical credentials.

Vocational chaplaincy is professional religious ministry implemented in pluralistic and intercultural institutional settings. Converge chaplains must be able to function cooperatively with other religious ministry professionals to all persons regardless of their faith identity or lack thereof. Our chaplains accept the responsibility to meet the religious needs of all individuals associated with their respective military unit, government agency or civilian institution, while maintaining the faith standards of Converge.

The ecclesiastical standards for Converge endorsement of men and women to chaplaincy include educational requirements, Converge church membership, credentialing and professional ministerial experience (PME). PME means an applicant has quality experience in performing or conducting those functions that are germane to the particular area of chaplaincy to which he/she is applying. This may include, but is not limited to, pastoral care, teaching, preaching, counseling, administrative leadership, ordinances/sacraments, baptisms, weddings, funerals/memorial services, and religious rites and rituals. Most entities employing chaplains expect the applicant to obtain PME after completing the M.Div. degree.

Chaplains typically encounter persons in all facets of life and seek to engage spiritual resources for meaning, healing, hope and wholeness. Thus, they need to have the skills and ability to:

1. Conduct ministry for persons whose religious faith parallels that of the chaplain,
2. Make provision for meeting and facilitating the religious needs of those who are adherents of other faith traditions and offer pastoral care to all persons regardless of their faith, values or lifestyle.
3. In situations where a chaplain is unable to meet a person's religious needs directly, the chaplain serves as a referral agent to seek appropriate chaplaincy services for the individual.

## **Calling and Credentialing**

In addition to an individual sense of calling to chaplaincy, persons seeking endorsement must have affirmation of their call from their local church. Converge chaplaincy office will contact the applicant's local church for affirmation of his/her calling.

Converge endorsement validates that the applicant is professionally credentialed for chaplaincy ministry. As representatives of our movement, our chaplains need to be knowledgeable of our history and supportive of our doctrines, religious practices and spiritual values.

It is the policy of Converge that ministerial credentialing is the responsibility and function of the local church in coordination with the respective districts.

Converge chaplaincy department recognizes the following credentials for endorsement to chaplaincy.

1. Ministerial License. Licensure is usually the initial ministerial credential. Candidates for endorsement need to view licensing as a temporary status leading to a higher level of credentialing.
2. Ordination. Traditionally, ordination is the highest level of professional ministerial credentialing common to the majority of protestant and evangelical denominations and fellowships.
3. Commissioning and Consecration. A local church may desire to designate Commissioning or Consecration as alternative terms for ordination, as long as the process is the same or very similar to ordination. The difference is the terminology.

## **Endorsement Categories**

The Converge NMCO endorses qualified RMPs as chaplains to the following.

1. The military branch services (Army, Air Force and Navy).
2. Health care facilities in the Department of Veterans Affairs.
3. Correctional facilities in the Bureau of Prisons (Department of Justice).
4. Health care institutions and facilities (hospitals, hospices, palliative-care) that require endorsement for employment as a chaplain. These institutions may also require that chaplains achieve Board Certification.

## **Areas Excluded from National Level Endorsement**

Applicants seeking endorsement to entities other than those previously listed should coordinate their interest with their local church and/or the regional Converge district. These include:

1. Facilities, such as local, regional or state hospitals, hospices, nursing homes, senior citizen centers and health care centers, that do not require official certification or endorsement from the national office of a religious organization.
2. State police departments. Local police, fire and emergency response departments and agencies.
3. Local city, county and state jails and correctional facilities.
4. Corporate, industrial and business entities.
5. Volunteer chaplain arrangements.

## **Non-transferability of Endorsements**

DOD, the VA and the BOP each have distinctive official endorsement forms. Therefore, an endorsement to one of these is valid only to that agency. Individuals seeking Converge endorsement for more than one of these entities, must have a separate endorsement. Furthermore, chaplain applicants may need to satisfy additional experience and/or training in order to be endorsed to that agency. Also, DOD, VA and BOP endorsements are not transferable to institutional and healthcare facilities.

## **REQUIREMENTS FOR ENDORSEMENT**

### **Chaplaincy All chaplaincy categories**

1. Be a member in good standing in a Converge church and have affirmation by that church of the individual's call to chaplaincy ministry.
2. Affirm agreement with Converge [Affirmation of Faith](#).
3. Make application to the Converge chaplaincy office, sign and submit all required documents.
4. Be appropriately credentialed. (See the following categories for credentialing details).
5. Have appropriate PME after seminary. (See the following categories for specific PME requirements). Possess the ability to minister in a pluralistic setting.
6. Willingness to facilitate, coordinate and provide religious programs for individuals of all faith groups.
7. Receive a favorable National Agency Check (criminal and credit check).
8. Have a personal interview with a chaplain designated by the NMCO. This is usually a senior chaplain serving within the particular agency to which an individual is applying for endorsement.
9. Satisfy the requirements that follow for the category to which you are applying.

### **Military Chaplaincy (active duty)**

1. Be a US citizen
2. Have an undergraduate degree (120 semester units) from an accredited educational institution of higher learning recognized by DOD.
3. Have a graduate degree (normally M.Div.) of 96 semester hours (minimum of 72) in a degree granting program from an educational institution accredited by the Association of Theological Schools.
4. Have two years PME after seminary in a Converge church.
5. Be credentialed by ordination, commissioning or consecration. (See the prior section on credentialing).
6. Apply for chaplaincy at a local recruiting office.
7. Affirm in writing, acceptance of and willingness to adhere to the [Code of Ethics-NCMAF](#) adopted by the National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces and agreed to by the Military Departments' Chiefs of Chaplains.
8. Be at the appropriate age for specific service branch and component.
9. Pass physical requirements and medical examination by the armed forces.

### **Military Chaplaincy (Reserve/National Guard)**

The requirements for Converge endorsement for the Reserves and National Guard chaplaincy are the same as those for active duty, except as noted below.

Have at least one year PME after seminary in a Converge church, unless the branch of service specifies a different time period of professional ministry experience.

## **Veterans Administration Chaplaincy**

1. Be a US citizen.
2. Have an undergraduate degree of 120 semester hours from an accredited institution of higher learning accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the Department of Education.
3. Have a M.Div. degree (normally 96 semester hours) or its equivalent educational qualifications in a degree granting program from an educational institution accredited by the Association of Theological Schools.
4. Have two years PME after seminary in a Converge church.
5. Be credentialed by ordination, commissioning or consecration. (See the prior section on credentialing).
6. Have at least two units of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). This normally includes 800 hours of supervised ministry in a formal training program.
7. Affirm in writing, acceptance of and willingness to adhere to the [Code of Ethics-ECVAC](#) adopted by the Endorsers Conference for Veterans Affairs Chaplaincy.

## **Bureau of Prisons (Department of Justice) Chaplaincy**

1. Ordinarily apply for appointment before one's 37<sup>th</sup> birthday.
2. Be credentialed by ordination, commissioning or consecration. (See the prior section on credentialing).
3. Pass a pre-employment physical examination.
4. Have a bachelor's degree.
5. Possess a M.Div. degree consisting of 90 hours of graduate study from an educational institution accredited by the Association of Theological Schools.
6. Two years of pastoral/spiritual experience in a congregational or specialized ministry setting within Converge after formal graduate education. One year of CPE may satisfy up to one year of this requirement.

## **Institutional Chaplaincy (hospitals, hospices and palliative care)**

1. Have a M.Div. degree or its equivalent in a seminary program for institutional chaplaincy.
2. Have at least one year PME after seminary having performed those functions normally associated with institutional chaplaincy.
3. Be credentialed by licensure at a minimum and preferably by ordination, commissioning or consecration. (See the prior section on credentialing).
4. Have at least two units of CPE. Four CPE units are required for endorsement for APC certification.
5. Affirm in writing, acceptance of and willingness to adhere to the [Code of Ethics-APC](#) adopted by the Association of Professional Chaplains.

## **Chaplain Candidate Program**

General information. Each branch of the military services (Army, Navy and Air Force) has a program for students enrolled in graduate theological education called the Chaplain Candidate program. Chaplain candidate programs exist for the purpose of familiarizing seminary students with religious support activities and experiences in the military environment. These programs are a means of evaluating the candidate for a commission as a chaplain. Chaplain candidates serve as commissioned officers in the Reserve components of the Military Departments, but they are not chaplains nor authorized to serve as, or function in place of, chaplains.

This program is also a time of discovery for the seminarian. It affords participants the opportunity to experience on-the-job training in the various facets of chaplaincy under the supervision of chaplains. As a participant in the program, the candidate should be able to discern whether to pursue chaplaincy as a profession or career.

Chaplain candidates need to understand that acquiring and fulfilling the professional ministerial experience for endorsement usually follows the completion of one's graduate educational requirements. Also, normally the next step is to access or supersede to the Reserves or National Guard and not directly to active duty.

Chaplain candidates need to understand that there is no obligation or guarantee on the part of Converge and the military services to endorse, access or supersede them as a chaplain to the Reserve Component, National Guard or active duty.

The requirements for this program are:

1. Be a citizen of the United States.
2. Have an undergraduate degree of 120 semester hours from an accredited institution of higher learning.
3. Be enrolled full-time in a graduate program of religious studies at an institution of higher education accredited by the Association of Theological Schools. Applicants for this program should have at least one year of seminary education remaining.
4. Make application to the Converge NMCO, sign and submit all required documents.
5. Apply to the military branch of interest.
6. Pass the physical requirements and examination by the Armed Forces.
7. Affirm agreement with the Converge [Affirmation of Faith](#).
8. Affirm acceptance of and willingness to adhere to the [Code of Ethics-NCMAF](#) adopted by the
9. National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces and agreed to by the Military Departments' Chiefs of Chaplains.
10. Receive a favorable National Agency Check (criminal and credit).
11. Be able to complete educational, ecclesiastical, and professional experience requirements for appointment as a chaplain prior to reaching the age limitation established by the Military Department to which the applicant is applying.