

Churches can aid veterans affected by troop reduction

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ALPHARETTA, Ga. (BP)—Churches have the potential to assist U.S. Army veterans who may find themselves retired prematurely within two years.

In a July Pentagon briefing, Brig. Gen. Randy George, the Army's director of force management, announced a reduction in force. The downsizing may affect 40,000 troops by the end of 2017, the Army News Service reported.

By the close of fiscal year 2018, the Army expects to have reduced in size from 490,000 to 450,000 troops. The Army also plans to cut 17,000 civilian employees. Reductions will come from some 30 Army installations.

'Difficult choices'

"These are incredibly difficult choices," George said. "The Army followed a long and deliberate process ... to determine the best construct for the Army, based on the threats we face and the current fiscal environment we must operate in."

George said the Army hopes to draw down the active force gradually to "minimize the turbulence we have with soldiers and their families."

Minimizing that turbulence is where churches can step in, said Doug Carver, a retired major general who served as the Army Chief of Chaplains and now is executive director of chaplaincy for the [North American Mission Board](#). Churches can be an integral part of re-entry into civilian life, he said.

"Military members are our neighbors," Carver said. "Over 85 percent of our military members, veterans and their families live in our communities."

Many of them are unchurched and remain unreached by local churches. Arguably, the military community represents one of the nation's largest unreached people groups."

Awareness the first step

Awareness is the first step for churches' ministry to the military, Carver said.

"We must recognize the significant number of veterans living in the United States," he said. "Members of the armed services—active, Reserve/National Guard and retired—are comprised of over 23 million Americans. Approximately 18 percent of this number is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention or other gospel partners.

"Our veterans and their families have a growing need for a cure to their wounds of war that can only be found in the gospel. A recent study by [Baylor University](#) concluded that 'clergy and the church—not psychologists or other mental health experts—are the most common source of help sought in times of psychological distress.'"

Carver noted churches can take practical steps to assist veterans, including:

- Maintain an awareness of the needs and sacrifices of our veterans and their families.
- Create an environment of acceptance for those recovering from their war wounds and other associated trauma.
- Provide pastoral care to deployed troops, veterans and their families.
- Establish reintegration ministry for those returning from a deployment or retiring from the military.

- Initiate an intentional trauma ministry strategy for military families.