

# Guantanamo chaplain's ministry has varied settings, same purpose

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GUANTANAMO BAY — Cmdr. Daniel McKay has viewed three different fronts of the war on terror during his career as chaplain. On board the U.S.S. Lake Erie, he learned first-hand how sanctions play a role in the war; in Ar Ramadi, Iraq, he saw the 2nd Marines involved with military combat missions; and now at Guantanamo Bay, he ministers to troopers involved with detainee operations.

At each location, however different or far from home, the need for Christ remains the same, McKay said.

“The setting changes ... [but] the ministry really doesn’t change,” the Navy chaplain observed.

McKay preaches at the Guantanamo Bay chapel at a Mother’s Day service on May 11.

“The need that human beings have for spiritual care and encouragement, that really doesn’t change.”

McKay has been in the military since his high school graduation, when he entered the U.S. Air Force. He became a reserve Army chaplain in 1992, and in 1994 he became a Navy chaplain. When he’s available, McKay attends the Baptist General Convention of Texas annual chaplaincy conference, supported by Mary Hill Davis Offering for Texas Missions, to continue chaplaincy education.

As a chaplain at Guantanamo Bay McKay does “everything a pastor would do at a church,” including Bible studies, worship services, and pastoral counseling. He said he works 14-16 hours a day, but he’s always on call for ministry duty.

“We work with our people every day,” McKay explained. “It’s more like a mission field. We get to see [the troops] in and out of their work centers.”

During his service in the Joint Task Force at Guantanamo, McKay said he’s encouraged every day by the “absolute professionalism” of his troopers.

“Our young men and women are doing an absolutely phenomenal job every day,” said the BGCT-endorsed chaplain.

“They’re doing a very demanding job in a very stress-filled place,” he said.

For the troops, the most important service a chaplain offers is confidentiality, McKay said. It’s unique to the chaplaincy.

“That’s our bread and butter as chaplains,” McKay said.

“We provide 100 percent confidentiality. It’s their information, and they have a safe place to share what’s on their hearts and minds.”

Chaplains encounter “the gamut of human concerns and needs” and should refuse no one, McKay added.