

SUBJECT: Strong Bonds Events and Same-Sex Couples – 5 SEP 2013

KEY MESSAGE: The Office of the Chief of Chaplains expects all chaplains to be faithful to their individual vows of ordination and religious beliefs as religious professionals; follow the guidance of their endorser/religious organization within their religious faith tradition; and fulfill the obligations that accompany their oath and commission to serve with honor in the Army as they perform their duties.

Talking Points:

- The U.S. Army Chaplain Corps provides religious support to the Army to facilitate the Free Exercise rights of Soldiers and Families.
- Endorsers and religious organizations should maintain an on-going dialogue with their chaplains on how to best perform or provide religious support for all service members.
- The Chaplain Corps upholds the Army Values and treats all Soldiers and Family Members with dignity and respect.
- Soldiers and Family members may participate in Army programs without any restriction on the basis of sexual orientation, including Chaplain-led programs such as Strong Bonds.
- The Chaplain Corps and DA representatives are reviewing the “way ahead” for the Strong Bonds program to ensure it is consistent with DoD policy and public law and respects the religious beliefs and conscience of Chaplains.
- The Soldier Family Ministry Directorate is currently reviewing the curriculum for Strong Bonds training materials, and believes this process is prudent, practical, and professional.

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Supporting Facts:

1. Chaplains “perform” direct religious support according to the tenants of their faith tradition and the dictates of their conscience, and “provide” religious support for all others by coordinating with another chaplain or qualified clergy to perform religious support as needed.
2. National Defense Authorization Act FY13, sec 533, authorizes chaplains to perform rites and services in conjunction with their conscience and endorsement. It also protects chaplains from discrimination and adverse action should they determine they cannot perform rites and services based upon ecclesiastical authorization.
3. Any program for military members, funded by federal money must adhere to laws and regulations governing use of these funds, to include audience, facilities and program material.
4. Title 10 US Code authorizes chaplains in U.S. forces to provide for and protect the free exercise of religion rights for all military personnel, regardless of their religious or non-religious affiliation.
5. The Chaplain Corps currently has chaplains from faith groups with doctrinal positions that allow for LGBT-oriented religious support.
6. Chaplains conducting Strong Bonds events should determine before the event if any same-sex couples desire to attend the training. In the event that a chaplain cannot perform the Strong Bonds event for same-sex couples due to denominational parameters, the chaplain should coordinate with another chaplain or qualified individual who is conducting a Strong Bonds event

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that would include same-sex couples.