

A Publication of the National Black Chaplains Association

The Capsule

OCTOBER 2019 | Volume 2 Issue 4



Highlights from the 29th Annual NBCA Conference in Washington, DC



Join the NBCA Today!

NBCA MEMBERSHIP HAS ITS PRIVILEGES

Who Can Join? – We are looking for diversity and a multicultural atmosphere that is open to all. Your culture, ethnicity, or religious background does not matter.

Why Join? – To strengthen our membership spiritually, naturally, multiculturally, clinically, administratively, and financially. To become writers and contributors with a voice and a perspective. To enhance, edify, and educate our global readership and learn from each other.

The Benefits of Membership – To improve the quality and quantity of life for veterans and their families. To receive discount hotel rates for the VA National Black Chaplains Association conferences. To be eligible to become a writer, facilitator, moderator, or key note speaker/presenter at various conferences.

Membership Levels:

- ▶ **General (Regular) Membership (\$50 annually)** is available to any African American or Minority Chaplain employed by the DVA.
- ▶ **Associate Membership (\$35 annually)** is available to all other chaplains employed by or retired from the DVA and clergy spouses of chaplains who qualify for membership. It is also extended to Minority Chaplains from other federal institutions including Military, Prison, CPE Residents, Endorsers and other Allied Professionals.
- ▶ **Board Membership (\$75 annually)** is extended to all persons holding office, committee chairpersons, past presidents, and active and retired African American chaplain executives.
- ▶ **Assistant Members (\$25 annually)** non-voting members who serve as advocates or recruiters for the organization \ that will contribute to and support the vision of NBCA.

Join us today! Membership forms available at vablackchaplains.org/join

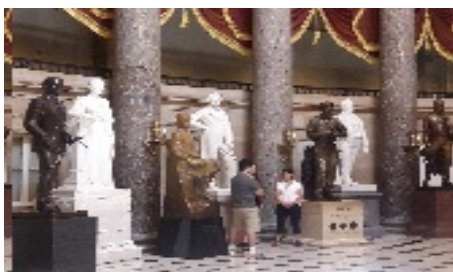
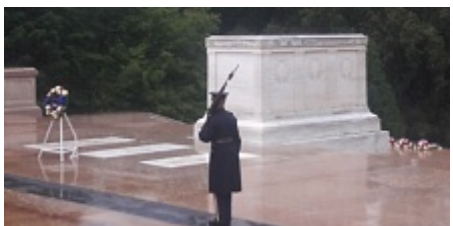
PAY ONLINE AT  [CLICK HERE](#)

Or make checks payable to:
National Black Chaplains Association

Mailing Address:
National Black Chaplains Association
P.O. Box 3059
Hampton, VA 23663

Inside This Month:

Highlights from the NBCA Conference



The Capsule is a quarterly publication that was launched in December 2017 by the National Black Chaplains Association. This multicultural publication is centered around a mission to inform, inspire, educate and connect chaplains, families and communities of all FAITHS and RACES through information, stories, food, and poetry. The Capsule is written primarily by Black Chaplains, but is also open to articles submitted by writers of other ethnic groups and other disciplines. In each issue we highlight articles with an African American, Multicultural, Pluralistic, Clinical, and Legislative Perspective – and so much more.

A Publication of the National Black Chaplains Association
The Capsule

The Capsule represents a pill filled with excellent ideas that will strengthen us, various experiences that will help us cope with struggles we all face, views that may challenge us or our beliefs, and educational tools designed to enhance our ministries and our togetherness as a people. If you **swallow the pill** (that is, take in the information so that it can be beneficial to you just as food is beneficial to our bodies), it is our earnest prayer that it will inspire you to always be your best, do your best, and make a contribution to this and future generations that will be a blessing to people of all ethnicities, especially veterans and their families.

The Capsule is designed to help individuals cope with daily struggles, strengthen their faith, draw closer to God and be a blessing to others. We believe that by consuming the pill or taking in our content, individuals will find a renewed sense of hope through inspiration and information that positively impact the world. We encourage your support through memberships, donations, subscriptions and advertisements at alfray.thomas2@va.gov, [donations](#), and [membership](#).

LET US PROMOTE YOU !

You can now market and highlight your special events, announcements, goods, and services in **THE CAPSULE** quarterly publication.

1/8 page: \$25.00 (business card size) 1/4 page: \$50.00
1/2 page: \$100 Full Page: \$150

All advertisements, from you or your organization, must be submitted camera-ready for publication. As a faith-based publication, all advertisements are subject to review and approval by the Capsule Editorial Staff.

Please make checks payable to National Black Chaplains Association

Mailing Address:

National Black Chaplains Association
P.O. Box 3059

Hampton, VA 23663

Attn: Chaplain Marvin Mills, President

For more information and submission instructions, please contact the Editor-in-Chief Rev. Dr. Alfray Thomas, Jr. at 918-671-0046 or by email alfray.thomas2@va.gov.

From the Desk of the President

The 2019 Training Conference in Review

Following the aftermath of a spirit filled training conference in Washington, DC, many of our attendees have echoed praises to God for such an unparalleled moment in time.

In recapitulating the events during the 29th training conference, there is a solemn yet celebratory song that comes to mind titled, "There is a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place, and I know it is the Spirit of the Lord..." Attendees considered themselves blessed to receive the "Mountain Top" experience characteristic of our Lord's Mount of Transfiguration event. In Hebraic thought, it was understood God possessed an affinity for high places and dwelt on the outermost pinnacles of the world. Analogous to the Disciples of Christ, we were reluctant to descend from the Mount due to our uninterrupted communion with the Lord who renewed and revived us.



Chaplain Marvin L. Mills, Sr.
President, NBCA

We left Washington on a trajectory riding on a wave of positive experiences which will serve us well as we address the challenges facing some of our members, i.e., CPE, board certification and yes, training dollars for the 30th Annual Session on August 26-29, 2020. (***Please Save This Date!***)

For this reason, I am eager to unveil specific aspects of my vision for the future. Before doing so, I must pause to express my gratitude for your unanimous support in the re-election of the current administration. Your display of support is noteworthy and heartwarming. On behalf of the Executive Board, I thank you for providing us with the mandate to carry on. We will continue to work to earn your respect, confidence and trust. As you know, it is the President who has the onus of responsibility to share the vision and assure its implementation:

- ▶ Upward Mobility in the VA Not Limited to Chaplaincy
- ▶ Multiculturalism with A Global Perspective
- ▶ Navigators Initiative: Coaching, Mentoring and Sponsorship
- ▶ Board Certification and Non-Traditional Approaches to CPE
- ▶ The Navigator's Initiative is Alive and Well in the Association
- ▶ Three Goals: Recruitment, Retention and Succession Planning
- ▶ Making Resources Available to Veterans and Their Families
- ▶ Producing Publications: Book of Sermons and Book of Prayers
- ▶ Obligations of Leaders and Members to the Association and Community
- ▶ Training in Suicide Prevention and PTSD
- ▶ Diversity and Inclusion Training
- ▶ Disaster Preparedness Training

Your ideas, suggestions and recommendations are always welcomed and appreciated.

Serving the Department of Veteran Affairs



EXECUTIVE BOARD

Chaplain Marvin L. Mills Sr.
President

Chaplain Clifton Montgomery Jr.
Vice President

Chaplain Kimberly R. Willis
Secretary

Chaplain Hayden E. Goodwin
Treasurer

Chaplain Timothy W. Storms
Financial Secretary

Chaplain Janis A. Grubbs
Historian

Chaplain Forrest L. Kirk
Parliamentarian

Executive Director
Chaplain Michael L. McCoy Sr.

Please submit articles
and photos to the
Editor-in-Chief

Printed copies of
The Capsule
are available
by subscription only
Contact the Editor-in-Chief
@ alfray.thomas2@va.gov

FROM MY HEART TO YOUR HEART

Greetings to our membership, writers, newsletter staff, and global readership! We recently wrapped up the 29th Annual National VA Black Chaplain's Conference in Washington DC. I am grateful for our writers and editorial staff for making this issue memorable and a blessing.

During the Conference, we will have the opportunity to tour the Smithsonian Museum of African American History. Furthermore, we will be enriched by great national speakers in their various fields of study. You will be educated and inspired by topics such as: *Why is Diversity of Development so important in Chaplaincy*, *90 Minutes in Heaven*, *Judges and Equal Justice for All*, *Education and Labor Issues Affecting Minorities*, *Police Reform and Mandatory Minorities*, *Domestic Abuse*, *Women Mortality and Gun Violence*, *What is the significance of the Wreath Laying Ceremony at the Arlington Cemetery*, and *Understanding the Navigators Program*.



Chaplain Rev. Dr.
Alfray Thomas, Jr.
Editor-in-Chief

"We all learn from each other – it's called the gift of sharing"

The conference was so impactful that we had to divide our coverage into two parts. **Part One** (Vol. 2, Issue 4 which is this issue – October 2019) will feature a summary of the conference by our very own, Chaplain Rev. Dr. Richard Ross who works at the VAMC in Redlands, California. **Part Two** (Vol. 3, Issue 1, which will be published in December 2019 on our 3rd Anniversary) will focus on the writing of various chaplains from across the country, commenting on their experiences and reflections while at the conference. It is my hope that the next two issues will encourage you to come to our next conference which will be held in Washington, DC in 2020.

Our 29th Annual Conference was entitled: **"Chaplaincy Leadership Training: In the Time of Crisis."** We had a collection of professional presenters and panels that inspired each of us to be perfected as chaplains and lay people. The ultimate goal was to improve our effectiveness in our local VA Medical Centers, and in Patient-Centered Care.

This issue is filled with inspiration, insight, information, and pictures. Stay tuned for Part Two. **ENJOY!**

EDITORIAL STAFF

Ch. Rev. Dr. Alfray Thomas, Jr., Editor-in-Chief (Clarksburg, WV); Ms. Linda Few, Layout and Production (Atlanta, GA); Ch. Rev. Torrey Johnson, (Pittsburgh, PA); Rev. Anna J. Thomas, (Bridgeport, WV); Ch. Elder Sherri Headen (Indianapolis, IN); Ch. Rev. Jennifer Dukes (Tuskegee, AL); Ch. Rev. Dr. Richard Ross (Redland, CA); Ch. Rev. Dr. Larry Black (Bay Pines, FL); Ch. Roosevelt Hanna (Tampa, FL); Ch. Jarda Alexander (San Diego, CA); Rev. Dr. Phillip Williams (Palo Alto, CA); Rev. Rhonda Neal (Danbury, CT); Ch. Rev. Dr. Gary Roundtree (Baltimore, MD); Ch. Rev. Jeffery Stallworth (Jackson, MS); Ch. Rev. Dr. Pearlean Scott (Kansas City, MO)



Chaplaincy Leadership Training: In the Time of Crisis

NBCA ANNUAL CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

DIARY OF AN ATTENDEE

by Chaplain Rev. Dr. Richard D. Ross, Redland, CA

The 29th Annual Conference of the *Department of Veterans Affairs National Black Chaplains Association* (NBCA) this year, titled: *Chaplaincy Leadership Training: In the Time of Crisis*, held from July 10-13, 2019, at the Hyatt Regency Washington D.C. on Capitol Hill,

had both a prime-time location and leadership in institutional chaplaincy that went with the territory. This year's conference, for the first-time ever united Black Chaplains with a panel of Native American Chaplains. Both traveled from both near and far across the spectrum of the United States, all, to participate in this annual event. Lead by President Marvin Mills Sr., Associate Director for Diversity Development at the National Chaplains Center in Hampton, Virginia. Nearly 60 Chaplains from VA Medical Centers across the country converged on Washington, DC. When asked how he was able to successfully schedule the many high-profile speakers at this year's conference, Chaplain Mills smiled and then enthusiastically replied, "God...it was God!"

On Wednesday afternoon, 10 July 2019, the first day of the conference, the icebreaker began with a tour of the recently opened Smithsonian Museum of African American History – a four-story building with a three-level basement concourse. The building – which itself is designed to look like a beautiful three-level ship form which the *Official Guide to the Smithsonian, National Museum of African American History and Culture* (p.25) called "The Corona." The Corona comprises 3,523 bronze-colored cast-aluminum panels. The filigree pattern of panel inspired by ornamental ironwork made by enslaved and free African American craftsmen in southern cities, such as Charleston and New Orleans" (*Official Guide to the Smithsonian, National Museum of African American History and Culture*, p.25).



The building has at its foundation the entry floor, which is called Heritage Hall. However, below the beautiful surface is the darkness below the surface in the three underground levels of the concourse. Concourse C1 is titled *A Changing America: 1968 and beyond*; concourse C2 is titled, *Defending Freedom: The Era of Segregation 1877-1968*; and concourse C3 is titled *Slavery and Freedom 1400-1877*. The upper three floors are: L2, Explore More! L3, Community Galleries; and L4, Cultural Galleries. These three floors, which are 'above ground' offer much light and contrast to the darkness found in the underground concourse level floors. One's tour starts best at the bottom floor and to works up to the top if possible so that you see the many world-class must-see exhibits (Which, if you have not seen – I will not ruin for you) in sequential order. Think about it. There was probably not a better way for the VA National Black Chaplains Association to begin an annual training conference titled, *Chaplain Leadership Training: In the Time of Crisis* – than remind us of the times of crisis endured by our ancestors. Quickly, we realized that whatever it may be that we are going through today, it pales in comparison to those of the past.



NBCA CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS: THURSDAY

The first full day began with a continental breakfast in our conference room, “Congressional A,” as Registration continued in the corner of the room. As you might expect with any group of Chaplains, the conference began on a very inspirational note as Chaplain Pearlean Scott, of VAHCS Kansas City, got our conference off to a great start as she offered the opening Devotional Service.

Following a warm greeting and welcome by Chaplain Mills, he struck the gavel officially opening VANBCA’s 29th Annual Conference. The Color Guard marched in to present the Colors, and a soul-stirring version of our National Anthem was rendered by Chaplain Dallas Jones before the invocation by Chaplain Allison Powell. VANBCA Vice-President, the man behind the scenes that helps all things to go well, did a little housekeeping by making a few important administrative remarks. Chaplain Montgomery also introduced The Navigator’s Initiative (please see article in *The Capsule*, July 2019, Volume 2 Issue 3).

After greetings and introductions, local Chief Chaplain, Chaplain Carol Lucas Ramsay, of VA Washington, DC, offered personal remarks of welcome, hospitality, and an open invitation for all interested, to visit VAHCS Washington, DC while in the area. Chaplain Ramsay also stated that in addition to the Veterans Crisis Line (1-800-273-8255, then press 1; Confidential Chat @VeteransCrisisLine.net or text to 838255) that there is also a VA Hotline for assisting Veterans with claims etc. (which can be very helpful for Veterans who may feel put off etc. by the VA) which is (855) 948-2311.

SESSION I

After a short break, there was a video on “Saratoga War Horse: A Creative Strategy for Veterans with PTSD. Afterward, there was a group discussion on the topic led by Chaplain Dr. Philip D. Williams, of VAHCS Palo Alto. Chaplain Williams stated that he is currently doing some joint institutional research with Stanford University on the topics of PTSD and Depression.



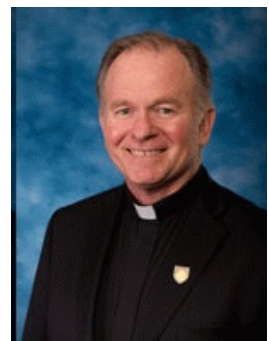
SESSION II



**Rev. Conrad
Washington**

After another short break, Chief Chaplain, Kimberly Willis, VAHCS Hampton, VA, and VANBCA Secretary, spoke to the group about the growing importance of Board Certification for all VA Chaplains. Chaplain Willis also spoke about NAVAC (National Association of VA Chaplains) as a more suitable option to board certification than with APC (Association of Professional Chaplains) for VA Chaplains. Then, the Reverend Conrad Washington, who first made it known he was not a former Marine but is still a Marine (Ohh-Rah) and is currently also the Acting Director of the Department of Veteran Affairs Center for Faith and Opportunity Initiative (CFOI). Rev. Washington spoke briefly about the outreach work that he is involved in as well as other opportunities for involvement.

In the first of two working-lunches, Chaplain (Father) Patrick J. Conroy, S.J., Chaplain, U.S. House of Representatives, addressed the group. Chaplain Conroy said that our job as chaplains is not about ‘bring God to people, as God is already here!’ Thus, we both (counselor and counselee) find that God is already there together.’ What it’s more about is ‘looking for God in each person that you encounter. Also, as chaplains – working in institutional ministry – we are upholding the 1st Amendment of the Constitution (Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof....) noting that Congress is guaranteeing the rights of the people we serve. However, as chaplains, we give up (not exercise) our right of religion as we often ‘give them up to ‘meet a non-believer or non-Christian where they are.’ So, it is about (taking a non-proselyting approach) in greeting them with “what’s going on in your life?” instead of “I am here to bring you, Jesus!” Concerning his job as Chaplain of the House,



**Chaplain Father
Patrick J. Conroy**

Chaplain Conroy noted that his role is a non-partisan one that he is not there to ‘judge’ people – only God does that.’ Other gems were: “People in crisis don’t need a leader acting like they are in crisis”: ‘People in Congress need someone happy to see them – so I have been happy for 7-years...and now I’m happy!’

SESSION III – Panel on Native American Affairs



Stephanie Birdwell

After a break, we had, for the first time; A panel on Native American Affairs moderated by Stephanie Birdwell, Director, Office of Tribal Government Relations (panel moderator); Rear Admiral Chris Buchanan, Deputy Director of Challenges in Indian Country; and Chaplain Anna Mae Taubeneck; VA Vet Center, Menlo Park, CA, and former Clinical Staff Chaplain, VAHCS Palo Alto, CA. In their presentation, the chaplains learned that many of the same problems that affect African American and minority Veterans also affect Native American Veterans. Another focus point of their presentation was on Claims to the tribal communities to try to reach Vets.

RADM Buchanan stated that there are 2.6 million Native American Veterans who are served in 37 states (particularly in more remote areas such as Phoenix, AZ; Big Bear, CA; and Alaska). Chaplain Taubeneck noted that the dilemma of Native Americans coming to inpatient treatment at VA (and maybe some other institutions as well) is that they can only choose one spiritual/religious identifier. This choice may not seem like a big thing, but many may be Christian and Native American and when asked may feel that need to identify in a more ‘traditional’ way – meaning identification with a specific ‘faith group.’ However, this also hurts them because their Native American spirituality is also equally important to them – and does not diminish them from their faith group but instead may embellish or strengthen it. Additionally, because this often happens, you never get an accurate picture of the number of Native Americans who may be receiving care at VA. Sometimes widows and family members of Vets discover they are eligible for benefits. Which helps stabilize a family. HIS – Indian Health Service – is mentioned as being a key organization in these efforts.



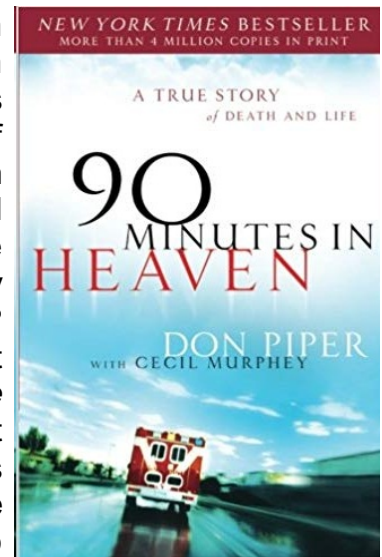
**Rear Admiral
Chris Buchanan**

Anna Mae Taubeneck, a Mohawk who works for VA Vet Center at Menlo Park, CA, but used to work for VAHCS Palo Alto (at Menlo Park campus) stated that “Thanksgiving” is important in Native American spirituality. Different from the American/Christian holiday celebration in November, the primary goal is maintaining what is known as a “good mind” throughout one’s life. While working at the VA, Chaplain Taubeneck noted that the spiritual and religious needs of Native Americans are only partially met. To fully meet needs begins with the way that intakes at VA. Reason being, a Veteran is asked the question of ‘what their spiritual or religious background is?’ They can only give one answer or response, and unfortunately, this is how they will be thought of as they receive care at the VA. What happens is that quite often the person may be Christian, but also Native American (spirituality) – which is also very important to them. Because they can only give one response, they may feel that they need to give the Christian denomination. However, then they will only receive spiritual care as a Christian, and their Native American side – which is not in competition with their Christian beliefs but can complement them. Additionally, Native American Vets are sometimes mixed-race. Their mixture may also cause them to be viewed as another race (Caucasian, African American, Asian-American, etc.) than Native American.

Chaplain Antoinette Toms addressed this topic from a personal perspective. Chaplain Antoinette Toms, a mixed-race (Native American and African American) Chaplain noted that she identifies as Native American. However, she is often thought of as African American because of her appearance. Racial identification problems are another set of factors in not being able to more accurately identify the number of Native Americans in the VA (and other healthcare) systems. The panel discussion ended with Chaplain Mills presenting certificates (as he did for each presenter) and acknowledging the assistance that early Native American ancestors provided to our African American ancestors in finding safe passage and freedom in America.

SESSION IV – The Reverend Don Piper

After the next break, Chaplain Alvin Mills (brother of NBCA President, Chaplain Marvin Mills), introduced Rev. Don Piper, author of the book (which has also been made into a movie) titled, *90 Minutes in Heaven*. Rev. Piper said that because of this experience, he is also working on a new book ‘People you meet at the gates of heaven that are going to be there because of you.’ Rev. Piper said that he was ‘run over and killed by a truck 30-years ago (at age 38) on 18 January 1989, but he is still here telling his testimony’ (praise the Lord!). He wrote a book 16-years ago, so he wouldn’t have to keep telling his testimony, but it hasn’t worked well.’ Many people say that they would like to die peacefully in their sleep, but “be ready at all times.” Why? Because “I got killed on my way to church.” Rev. Piper said, “I became a Christian at the age of 15 and underwent ordination at age 16. I had a book with me titled, *Believe in One God* on the day of the accident where an 18-wheeler swerved to miss a car but hit my car head-on on the Trinity River bridge. I was killed instantly.” Rev. Piper was dead for about 90-minutes before he miraculously came back to life. During the time he was dead, Rev. Piper stated that “I met a lot of people who helped me to get to heaven, and they all met me at the gates of heaven. So, I realize, heaven in a real place.” Rev. Piper then gave each chaplain this question to reflect on: “who will be there because of you?” He added, “I don’t think that anyone in heaven misses you...they expect you...and they will be waiting. For there is no time in heaven.” Rev. Piper and his wife (whom he called “the hero of the story,” had video and books for sale – which he would also personally sign) available to the group afterward.



Dr. Kenyatta Gilbert

SESSION V – Preaching Through A Crisis

After a warm and personal friendship-based introduction by Chaplain Fred Tittle, Martinez, CA, Dr. Kenyatta Gilbert, Professor of Homiletics, Howard University, School of Divinity, Washington, DC, addressed the group with a sermon titled, “Preaching Through A Crisis” in which he often quoted from his latest book “Exodus Preaching: Crafting Sermons About Justice and Hope.” Dr. Gilbert stated that “in every circumstance, God raises a Moses.” He also stated that “preachers have an awesome task. We must stand before our congregations espousing the message of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ” – Dr. Charles Edward Boone. Also, “In service to Jesus Christ, the preacher’s role is to interpret scripture for the whole community.”

However, there is also a need for a prophetic dimension in our preaching – and less of a need to preach on prosperity or to preach only on the New Testament. “So, if the Bible may have more to say to us, then why do we insist on showing the Bible into a Hermeneutical straight jacket? If so, you have rendered yourself inconsequential for this generation who refuse to listen to the preacher or go to church.” Our culture and experience have shaped our lived and contextualized experience and have given us an authentic message that people need to hear at this time and place. As we may well be aware, there are many who feel that their experiences are unique, and no one has ever experienced this before. Such conclusion sometimes leads them to fall away from their faith and beliefs and stop believing and attending their church or place of worship and develop what many call their spirituality or unique way of believing – that accompanies their unique suffering or trauma. The ancient Greeks used ‘irony’ to get at the truth. Hebrews 10:25 says, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (KJV). Therefore, preachers have the assignment and moral authority to speak the truth in love, based on their own lived experiences, to help bring, justice, hope, and healing to the body of Christ.



SESSION VI

After a break, the group boarded the chartered bus again this time headed to Arlington National Cemetery, just across the bridge in Arlington, Virginia. Here the group visited the famous, "Tomb of the Unknown Soldier" for its traditional "Changing of the Guard" ceremony. According to the website, this takes place every 30 minutes during the summer, every hour in the winter, and every two-hours when the cemetery closes.



On Thursday evening, 11 July 2019 at 6:30 p.m., a special program led by the VA National Black Chaplains Association. President Mills (in uniform) led the wreath ceremony; Chaplain Tammie Elfadili (in uniform), Chief Chaplain Sherman Baker, and Chaplain Alvin Mills. The group then briefly toured the museum before boarding the bus again to have a moment of silence and then place the wreath at an area known as "Chaplain's Hill."



NBCA CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS: FRIDAY

On Friday, 12 July 2019, after the continental breakfast, the morning began with a few administrative announcements from NBCA Vice-President and VA Houston Chief Chaplain Clifton Montgomery. Chaplain Montgomery spoke of NBCA's mission to Chaplain recruitment, retention, education, growth/development. Additionally, there is a need to help Chaplains who have completed a residency or CPE programs or residencies to navigate the application process of applying for VA other federal jobs and the ever-changing employment process. Therefore, under something NBCA President has named, "The Navigator's Initiative," NBCA now offers, *Career Exploration and Skill Development*; and *Mentoring*. Chief Chaplains are asked to meet with the Vice-President on Saturday for a short meeting after the conclusion of the conference to discuss implementation of this program at their VA.

Next was a Memorial Service for the late Chaplain (retired in 1998) Miles Murphy, Jr. (10 AUG 1928 – 02 MAR 2019) led by Chaplain Jim (Luke) Pittman of the Maryland VA Health Care System. Chaplain Pittman lead the group in a very soulful rendition of *I'll Fly Away*. He then rendered a humorous but touching eulogy cleverly using the example of Popeye the Sailor Man. He shared sayings (from the theme song), "I'm strong to the finish because I eats me spinach". (I'm Popeye the Sailor Man!) Chaplain Pittman spoke of how Popeye always broke open a can of spinach when he needed strength to protect his loved ones (Olive Oyl and Swee'Pea) from his nemesis, Bluto. We probably all remember this heroic cartoon from our childhood. Chaplain Murphy, however, was a real-life hero who leaves behind a legacy of leadership, mentoring of many young chaplains, and protecting his loved ones, through faith in our Lord and Savior, through prayer, through the scriptures (such as Psalm 121 which read during the service) and preaching. However, unlike spinach, these spiritual interventions and life of ministry, not only strengthened and enabled Chaplain Murphy in fighting the good fight but also lighted The Way to eternal life.

SESSION VII – VA Pain Management, DOD Strategies, Opioids Epidemic



Dr. Matthew Miller

This seventh session was moderated by NBCA Chief Editor, Chaplain Dr. Alfray Thomas, Jr., VA Clarksburg, WV, and featured Dr. Matthew A. Miller, Director, Veterans Crisis Line, and Acting Executive Director, Suicide Prevention in the U.S., Department of Veterans Affairs, and Chief Chaplain Dr. Gwendolyn Lewis, VA Augusta, GA.

Dr. Miller stated that 45,000 people die by suicide each year. It is not just a Veteran. Problem. I first experienced suicide at Vance AFB when a sergeant died by suicide. Then the first thing is that a mutual friend called me and asked, Why? There is no single cause of suicide. However, there are common risks and safety factors that come into play. We do know that treatment works. CT, Prolonged Exposure, partnering with Chaplains helps. It is meaningful to our Veterans who we serve. It is estimated that there are 135 people affected by each suicide. So, there is a "ripple effect." I experienced this as it was something that I needed to work through that affected my career trajectory. Here are some important figures to keep in mind: The rate of suicide was 1.8% higher among females Veterans than non-Veteran. For males 1.4% higher among Veteran males than non-Veterans. Age group: Male 18-34 has the highest rate of suicides. However, Male Veterans age 55 and older had the highest count of suicides by 'raw count.' 69% of Veteran suicides resulted from firearms. Of the 20 Veterans that die by suicide each day, 14 have been under VHA care, while six are still in VHA care.

However, 123 Americans die by suicide each day. And 1-2 Active duty service members die by suicide each day. We all share responsibility for preventing suicide. We need to know where to spend our time and money because lives are on the line. We need to equip you better (as Chaplains) as you are on the front lines. We also need to equip staff and others better. VA's Public Health Approach (and what the VA is doing about that). (Categories: All, Some, and Few vs. Individual, Family, Community, and population as a whole). In suicide prevention, you must fill in all those boxes to have a comprehensive plan. We needed to also extend our care to 'all Veterans' and extend our care because this individual lives within a family, which has a community, a church, and friends. Also, there are various disparities (economic, racial, etc.). Therefore, "Suicide Prevention is Everybody's Business."

What You Can Do to Help Prevent Suicide: We can't do it alone. To download resources, go to:

www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention_resources

www.psycharmor.org/courses/s-a-v-e

Addressing the Opioid Epidemic: A Chaplain Research-based Presentation

by Chaplain Service, VANBCA (Chaplain Gwendolyn Lewis and panel), 32 pages. By Chaplain Dr. Gwendolyn D. Lewis, D.Min, BCC (Chair); Chaplain Dr. Ernest Benson, D.Min BCC; Chaplain Eddie Davis; Chaplain Jennifer Dukes; and Chaplain Dr. Pearlean Scott, D.Min, BCC.

The above is a Chaplain Research-Based presentation presented by Chaplain Service and VANBCA, inspired by June 4, 2015, Time Magazine article titled: "Why America Can't Kill Its Painkiller Problem." Chaplain Lewis noted that there is a list of Opioids that have now become "household names" they are so commonly heard (or spoken). 20% of Heroin users first used prescription opioids. Opioid prescriptions increased by 153% between 2004 and 2011. Opioid-related deaths were once rare, but not anymore. Is there a Causality between Opioids and Suicide/Homicide? Opioid overdose has doubled since 1999, and opioid misuse is associated with suicide.

VA now has what is known as the Whole Health Program: which is an Evidence-based practice, to better address the opioids epidemic as VA shifts from a health care system focused primarily on treating disease (i.e. What's wrong with you?) to one guided by a personalized health care plan (How can I help you reach your goals?). Thus, Whole Health programs are a non-pharmaceutical and holistic method of pain management. They are also about having the right plan and the right care for the right person. Statistics reflect that 13% of Veteran suicides relate to opioid use. Opioids are now the leading accidental cause of death in the United States. In 2017 the number of deaths was 72,000.

President Trump declared Opioid Crisis a Public Health Emergency on October 26, 2017. Before this date there was an October 2015 Presidential Memorandum: Addressing Prescription Drug Abuse and Heroin Use – which was issued by President Obama.

What Can Chaplains Do?

1. Facilitate Chronic Pain Spirituality Groups
2. Assist Veterans in exploring spirituality as a way of coping with chronic pain.
3. Educate medical staff about the impact of spirituality on health care.
4. Help Veterans identify/explore their religious coping strategy in the management of chronic pain.
5. Advocate to encourage multidimensional treatment modalities and multiple pathways to treatment of chronic pain.

What are some other ways? By utilizing Mindfulness, Mindful Meditation, and Contemplative Prayer in our Pastoral Counseling sessions, and becoming advocates for Veterans on Whole Health and Pain Management Committees. There is currently an Evidence-Based model utilizing Spiritual Care as a part of the Whole Health non-pharmaceutical model for Opioid Pain Management. It is a 10-week long course – Interdisciplinary team focused program at VA Central Alabama that was introduced by Chaplain Dukes.

What is the Impact of the Opioid Crisis to Minority Communities? No easy fix to its social and economic determinants. Phases of the epidemic (it is not slowing down; it is almost doubling). The deaths are going up because due to the availability of desired meds (people are taking more risks). How does this opioid problem often start? People would often dull their pain with alcohol – but in the field (or at work) you must find an acceptable way of dealing/coping with the pain (external and internal) and thus – painkillers (opioids) were used. *As this is a 'prescribed' and 'legal' prescription. So, therefore, it is easy for family to have denial about this (i.e. 'shouldn't the doctor know better?')

Overcoming family denial and renewal of relationships is the role of the Clinical Chaplain. Denial is "a condition in which persons will not admit that something sad, painful, etc. is true or real." Overcoming family denial requires families to overcome 'enabling behaviors' Chaplains can plan and facilitate effective interventions: Offer specific instances to Veteran; non-judgmental etc. Chaplains can also help by 1. Affirming Realistic expectations; and 2. Teaching healthy Communications. How will we ultimately be able to be strengthened in helping others as Chaplains? We have 'Holy Ghost' power.

QUESTIONS from the group and answers by Dr. Miller

QUESTION: There is still no Chaplain available on the Veterans Crisis Line. Why not?

ANSWER: The Crisis Line focuses on suicide prevention – situations of imminent danger. The follow-up is (should be next day) with local resources. (Dr. Miller mentions Saginaw Michigan, and local Suicide Prevention Coordinator Mr. Gray's referral to his to Chaplain, Perry Parker – as a way that Chaplains often receive either the same day or next day referrals from Veterans Crisis Line).

QUESTION: Concerning the upcoming VA/DOD Conference (27-29 AUG 2019 in Nashville): What might be the purpose or primary goal have had both groups together to discuss the hot topic of Suicide Prevention?

ANSWER: When Veterans are transitioning from active duty to civilian, they are thinking about the moving, etc. but not the VA. We must, therefore, improve our 'warm handoff' from military to VA – so that both fail to take responsibility in various ways (Vet is no longer ours, or Vet didn't register) so that no one is shirking responsibility (or is 'left behind').

QUESTION: Many times, when Vets leave active duty, they don't want to have anything to do with the VA. How do we begin to change this?

ANSWER: We have been trying to, therefore, work on making contact, follow-up, and encouraging enrollment in MH programs. Also, Community involvement is encouraged (Community Partners – i.e. churches and outside organizations, sometimes office of mayor or SBC, etc. to provide Veterans Outreach; VA CCTP outreach is also mentioned). The first question to Veterans (at VA) used to be, "Are you enrolled?" It is now, "How can we help you?" Now, it doesn't matter whether you are 'enrolled' or not, you walk in and ask to speak with a mental health provider, and you get assistance. Also, each of us should make it our business, to affirm what we do as Chaplains; part of this 'advocates' for our Veterans.

MORPHINE EQUIVALENT, DAILY DOSAGE RATES FOR VETERANS is 4 mg. However, this level (4 mg), is a level reserved for Hospice and Palliative Care. No one that is not on hospice should be over 2 mg. Therefore, meds have recently been 'tapered' back. Thus, as Veterans get pain meds reduced (by rule/law – VA/FED and State govt.) they may experience more pain. So, Non-Pharmaceutical methods such as Yoga, Ta Chi, various Spirituality groups, etc. can help reduce pain of Vets who are suffering – without additional pharmaceutical medications. Chaplains should consider accessing "The Storm" blackboard – as it will tell you which Veterans are 'at an elevated risk' of Opioid addictions.

QUESTION: WHAT IS "THE STORM"?

ANSWER: The Stratification Tool for Opioid Risks Mitigation (STORM), was developed by the Office of Mental Health. It pulls information from a Veterans medical record and evaluates risk for suicide. So, from STORM you can see if an individual is at risk. Additionally, the "PECK" portal – is available through the office of mental health and suicide prevention. The PECK portal is the same that gives access to SAIL portal and STORM dashboard. However, you may need to get permission for the social security level view. *Informed Consent* – is sometimes not being done as to what the medication might do to you as far as addictions (although side effects are now often mentioned). But with Informed Consent as full physical is needed now.

The Joint Commission, which evaluates patient care looks at what decreases patient pain and if the patient happy. They were looking at lowering the pain scores. So, opioids were increased. Also, Veterans might file a 'congressional' if they feel that they are not getting adequate treatment (i.e. decreased pain). "Prescription Shopping" – is also mentioned. This is when Veterans go from one Provider (that might have denied them painkillers) – to another in getting 'what they want.'

Lastly, Cannabis (or marijuana) is mentioned and briefly discussed. Although legalized in some states - acceptance of this is still being discussed by the Federal government and thus also the VA (but at this time has not been approved).

Chaplain Mills – Summary – what we are trying to do is to help Veterans better address their “suffering.” Personal story: His wife – Nurse: ‘we can give her more pain medication – but it will kill her.’ So, in other words...as Chaplains – ‘be cautious’ as when you are going through certain surgery and medical issues. For Chaplains, we must be there to encourage them and remind them that (apart from any medications) ‘greater is He that is in you (The Great Physician) than He that is in the world.’

SESSION VIII

Working LUNCH: After the introduction of the speaker by Chaplain Tammie Elfadili, VA Houston, Dr. Cheryl Sanders, Professor of Christian Ethics at Howard University School of Divinity and Pastor of the Third Street Church of God, Washington, DC, addressed the group on the topic of “Social Ethics in a Time of Crisis”.



Dr. Cheryl Sanders

Often – you will see that the people in the Bible are in Crisis (book-by-book). So, we don’t have to invent crisis. Crisis is a ‘human condition.’ The question is: How will we respond to it? (Please see: Act 4:24-31) Acts of the Apostles are misnamed and should be called The Acts of the Holy Spirit. What we see is the formation of leadership. At the end of each Gospel, Jesus commissions people. This also happens in the first chapter of Acts. So, in Acts we see the disciples stay in Jerusalem; We see them pick Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot.

In the Gospels, we see Peter as being both bold and often wrong. Sometimes he was right, but sometimes he was wrong. It was what I call “holy boldness.” Three thousand people were baptized that day. The prayer of Peter and John (who were personality opposites) – might be a prayer that we can re-use.

Three Points on this prayer: That God will support a church led by leaders. By ‘leaders’ I mean people who have the boldness to lead others during a time of social crisis. As God is not looking for perfect people, but for people, who are ‘seeking perfection.’ It also requires a belief that God ‘still speaks’ and that ‘God still heals.

1. Concern – We should be concerned about what God is concerned about (His people)
2. Courage – How we respond to things that threaten us. So, we don’t respond with denial or the strength of our personality. This is the courage to speak: a. Truth to power; and b. Good news to the poor. This is to ‘let them know that they will not be poor always’ (that they will have riches in heaven etc. – or that in heaven ‘the first will be last and the last will be first’).
3. Compassion – True religion is to minister to widows and orphans in their affliction (James 1:27). However, we are still ministering in environments where people have lost hope. How do we do this? Remind them that God has promised to ‘never leave us nor forsake us’ etc. Compassion means that we (as Chaplains) will still ‘hang in there’ with people who have lost everything. Peter and John – would ‘rejoice – that they were found to be worthy of suffering.’

In closing: God is not only looking for Chaplains to pray, but for servants fully equipped with Concern, Courage, and Compassion – to face a crisis of our time.

PAIRS ESSENTIALS (W2SM) and Whole Health Advocacy

Julie Macias, Program /Training Director for Purpose Built Families Foundation, Pembroke Pines, FL, and Director at Operation Sacred Trust through Carrefour Supportive Housing; and Chief Chaplain Dr. Dwight Webster, VA Cincinnati.

The duo passed out two of the PAIRS/W2SM cards (a. Emotional Jug and b. Emptying the Emotional Jug) and discussed the critical training points of PAIRS ESSENTIALS with the group. They were as follows. Relationship Skills:

1. Enhanced Communication;
2. Healthy Conflict Resolution;
3. Expand Emotional Awareness;
4. Deepen Connection and Intimacy.

For PAIRS, *The Language of Love* is a. Compassion; b. Empathy; c. Goodwill; d. Bonding.

PAIRS/W2SM gives you the tools so that you know what to do. This speaks to the idea of 'LEVELS OF LEARNING' which is as follows:

- a. Unconscious Incompetence - I didn't know that I didn't know;
- b. Conscious Incompetence - I know that I didn't know;
- c. Conscious Competence – I am learning;
- d. Unconscious Competence – I know what I know.

RELATIONSHIP Road Map; Avoidance, Pain, bonding;

ASPECTS OF COMMUNICATION;

- 1. Self, 2. Other, and 3. Context.

To "Leveling" EMOTIONAL JUG – leaks through "Dirty Fighting" (sarcasm etc.). These are some of the ways of fighting that only make things worse (this can also lead to feeling of suicide). Therefore, we must learn to 'empty the Emotional Jug.' Or let these things out in a healthier way (instead of simply 'popping your cork' – or assuming, stonewalling, etc.) So, in other words, one can explode (let emotions flood out) or implode (hold emotions inside). So, our feelings are like "warning signs".

GROUP EXERCISE: EMPTYING THE "EMOTIONAL JUG" (You do this exercise while holding hands, eye contact, nodding head, not interrupting – in the "leveling" position. After each thought expressed, the response is "thank you."). What else are you about? x3 (or more); If you were about anything else...what would it be? Chaplains partnered up (in role-play or real-life issues going on in their own lives, marriage or relationship with significant other.

GENERAL POST FUNDS

Sabrina Clark (Director, National General Post Funds Committee; former Chief, Volunteer Service at VA Baltimore – 9 years). Some of the most important points discussed for chaplains to be aware of are as follows.



Why was the General Post Fund established? To increase the ability of the community to assist in care for Veterans (i.e., people wanted to know ways they could do more to help Veterans). What is a General Post Fund Account (GPF)? - It is a Federal Trust Account established to hold donated funds/proceeds to carry out Donor's intent to benefit the agency/patients/members. Why would someone donate to VA? Shouldn't our tax dollars be enough? Taxes do not pay for everything that Veterans need. Example: Taxi rides for Veterans who get stranded at VA; meals for outreach programs (such as CCTP, W2SM, etc.).

Donations to the GPF are tax-deductible (however GPS is not a 503C – which is a designation that the Federal government itself does not have. Also, it can be 'earmarked' for a specific service and even specific programs within that service.

Who utilizes donations that come to VA? Voluntary Services, Chaplain Services, and Recreational Therapy). However, if there are records of these funds mismanaged, they can be 'swept' and sent to the Treasury. Good records keeping means: If there is money left over, it should be 'sent back' so when the 'audit' comes in – it is accounted for to the penny! Members (VHA 4721) Veteran patients, outpatients, homeless Veterans, Veteran residents in domiciliary or community living center, caregivers of Veterans and other eligible beneficiaries, who are being treated in VA facilities. Also, funds can be used for Outreach (but is limited).

Who can accept a donation? SEVCA (Sabrina Clark); Director, Voluntary Service (or designee); Also: Chief Chaplains 'can' accept a donation – (*see VHA 4721 – if anyone gives you trouble – show them this document – chapter and verse). Where are GPF accounts maintained? Austin Finance Center – treated like appropriations. Station specific accounts established

When can I use the funds? GPF may be used to purchase items to be blessed or consecrated for the use in serving the religious needs of Veteran patients. GPF funds may be used to provide honoraria for clergy or musicians who provide services on a non-recurring basis. Payment for such services must be made, by VA contracting policies and procedures, VA Directive 1111.

When can't I use GPF money? For expenditures incurred in the care and treatment of a patient in a VA medical facility, or to purchase, maintain, or repair equipment used to provide care and treatment, nor are they to be used for recurring operations; To reimburse the salary or contract costs of medical care providers; Or, to fund an individual membership in a professional organization.

How do people donate? Checks, cash, e-Donate, etc. items in-kind, bequests. How can I get access to GPF money? VAVA (establish an account) *Each Service should have a "cardholder" or CO Advance. Q: What form do we use to request funds from our portion of GPF for use with Spiritual Care groups etc.? (*Please see Ms. Clark or Chaplain Mills)

STATE OF THE ASSOCIATION BANQUET:

Chaplain Derrel Hughes, Supervisor Chaplain, VA Atlanta Health Care System and former President, VA National Black Chaplains Association. Honoree: Chaplain (Major General USA Ret.) Matthew Zimmerman, Jr., First Black Chaplain General in the Army, first Black Chief Chaplain with the Department of Veterans Affairs, and first Black Department of Veterans Affairs, Director of VA Chaplains.



NBCA CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS: SATURDAY



Chaplain Barry Black

Chaplain Oledia Bell presided over the Saturday morning Prayer Breakfast, which featured Retired Rear Admiral and Chief of Chaplains, United States Navy, and current Chaplain to the United States Senate, Dr. Barry Black. In her introduction, Chaplain Bell said, "Some people look at things and ask, why? I look at things and ask, why not?" – George Bernard Shaw.

Chaplain Black then began to address the group with a quote by Howard Thurman, "Don't ask what the world need, ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive", and then went on to note Biblical example of those who did not seek the highest places or seats of leadership (examples: Naaman, David, etc.) – but service to God and others, but were promoted up – as leadership is influence. Therefore, we (Christians) are to be 'the salt of the earth' (Matthew 5:13).

One point to note was this question: “What happens when the leadership can’t remember the dream? That is when spiritual leaders come to the forefront.” If you are going to lead in troubled times;

1. Don’t conform to this world (Romans 12:1-2);
2. Find Allies (Matthew 18:19-20; Eccl. 4: 9-12; Luke 10:10);
3. Harness Prayer (James 5:16).

Chaplain Black told a personal story based on James 1:5-6 and how when he gets up in the morning he gets up on his knees in prayer (and even has a pillow positioned on the floor next to his bed) asking God for wisdom in handling the events/issues of the day. As he invited all Chaplains gathered to join him in his effort. Chaplain Black said that “God’s wisdom ‘stupid proofs’ your life.” Chaplain Black also noted the personal improvements and achievements in his life that came after he began to pray James 1:5 and Luke 11:13. Chaplain Black added that the real test is how those closest to you will respond, as he noted that one day his wife said, “whatever has happened to you, I want it to happen to me.” So, his wife also started praying these prayers, and now she is a university professor. So, why not ‘start your day on your knees?’ Roman’s 8:26 also reminds us that even on those difficult days that the Holy Spirit interprets our moaning and groaning and communicate that in prayer to God. So, in this, God’s Spirit will take over, and ‘pray for you.’



Chaplain Juliana Lester

The closing worship service featured Chaplain Juliana Leshar, the National Director of VA Chaplaincy. Chaplain Leshar’s message to the group was titled “Living Your Calling.” Chaplain Leshar shared various life struggles that have challenged her faith and led her to a deeper walk with God. In trusting God’s leading, Chaplain Leshar now leads approximately 850 VA Chaplains as the second female National Director of VA Chaplaincy. Chaplain Leshar encouraged us to be obedient to the convictions that God has placed in your heart and listen to the voice of God even when people may oppose you.

Chaplain Leshar’s three points were: 1. “Live with a calling that leads you to walk with confidence.” 2. “Live with a conviction that leads you to walk with courage.” (David vs. Goliath, for the battle is the Lord’s. Therefore, it is ‘not my might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord.’ The time is now to ‘step out on faith.’) 3. “Live with a conscious that leads you to walk with compassion.” One of the most memorable stories Chaplain Leshar told is one from a notecard with the caption “Hope” and a picture on it of a woman playing the harp that had only one battered string left on it (harps typically have 47 strings). A friend of Chaplain Leshar’s once gave this notecard to her and reminded her, “Juliana, you may feel you have no hope. Even though you feel hopeless, I am going to play that one broken string until you can play it yourself.”

Chaplain Leshar concluded, we must do this for our Veterans. What does this mean? It means to be willing to speak truth and hope into Veterans lives – which is like playing that ‘one broken string’ for them until they too can play it themselves. It is this ‘hope’ that Chaplains bring when they see the emptiness and brokenness in other’s lives and say, “can we talk?” It is the compassion we bring to others (that we all also need for ourselves – and maybe were given by others at some point in our lives). We are called, therefore, to be the ‘people of God’ and “act with confidence.” Remember the “convictions” the Holy Spirit has placed in your heart, stand with a strong conscious, and live with courage that acts with compassion.” Lastly, like Chaplain Black, Chaplain Leshar acknowledged that she also begins each morning on her knees in prayer in giving thanks for life and her role of service through Servant-Leadership. We closed our time and annual conference together on our feet, holding hands, unified as Chaplains, in a circle of prayer.



**If you have been blessed by the content of this publication
and would like to see it reach more people,
please consider making a donation to
the National Black Chaplains Association.**

We are grateful for your support and look forward to helping more people.

**I would like to support the vision of the VA National Black Chaplains
Association with a donation of:**

\$25 ____ \$35 ____ \$50 ____ \$100 ____ \$200 ____ Other \$ ____

Make checks payable to: National Black Chaplains Association

PAY ONLINE AT  [PayPal](#) [CLICK HERE](#)

Mailing Address:

National Black Chaplains Association

P.O. Box 3059

Hampton, VA 23663

Your tax-deductible donation will benefit the mission of the Department of Veterans Affairs National Black Chaplains Association; to strengthen the effectiveness of not only African American chaplains, but to all other chaplains of ethnic groups, to assist in the recruitment and retention not only of African American chaplains but to all other chaplains of ethnic groups, and to foster the education, growth and development of all federally employed chaplains and professional allies.

Why Donate to the NBCHA?

- ▶ To help bridge the gap and celebrate all race relationships.
- ▶ To heal one's view of self, others, and how we are uniquely tied to each other no matter our family of origins.
- ▶ To appreciate and celebrate cultural diversity.
- ▶ To recruit writers and new members from every sector of the globe.
- ▶ To inspire patients, veterans, families, chaplains, and all others with hope, love, and joy and a determination to make a difference and a contribution in the earth.

The Purpose of Donations

- ▶ To broaden the multicultural perspective because everyone is important and has something beneficial to offer.
- ▶ To support the upward mobility efforts of all Chaplains.
- ▶ To strengthen the Executive Board and their committees to plan, organize, train, teach, and host Annual Conferences.

How Will Donations Be Used?

- ▶ To develop training for Chaplains and non-Chaplains to effectively tackle issues together such as the Opioid crisis, MST, women's issues, and medical and health issues that impact everyone.
- ▶ To educate and network with churches and other organizations or professionals that desire to work with the NBCHA to make their communities better, especially those with veterans.
- ▶ To sponsor those individuals who have a financial hardship to conferences hosted by the NBCHA.

What is the Impact of Donation?

- ▶ The ability to change lives through knowledge and by example.
- ▶ The ability to learn from others and even better oneself in the process.