

A Publication of the National Black Chaplains Association

The Capsule

JANUARY 2020 | Volume 3 Issue 1

More Highlights
From the 2019
NBCA Conference

Join the NBCA

The Power
of Diversity

Native American
Veterans and Chaplains
Facing the Challenges

We Have Journeyed A Mighty Long Way
A Look at the Smithsonian National Museum
of African American History and Culture



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 3044
Hampton, VA 23663

Inside This Month:

More Highlights from the NBCA Conference

The Challenges of
the Native Americans..... page 5

The Impact of
the Smithsonian Museum.....page 6

Power of Diversity.....page 7

A Discussion about the War Horse
Treatment Program/PTSDpage 8

PAIRS.....page 9

Suicide Prevention.....page 10

The Reflections of a message
delivered by Rear Admiral
Barry C. Black.....page 11

In Times of Crisis Poem.....page 12

Reflections of the Conferences
by First Timers.....page 13

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.



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 3044
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

Happy New Year To All! May Each and Every one of You Receive The Bountiful Blessings Of God.

In the last issue of the *Capsule* we unveiled specific aspects of the President's vision. In this issue those aspects are being reprinted with urgent emphasis to underscore their relevance to what needs to be accomplished this year. In August, 26 – 29, 2020, the Association observes its 30th Anniversary at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, Washington, DC. Below please find a tentative schedule which allows for the incorporation of your input. Remember the Honorable Robert Wilke, our VA Secretary has announced his #1 priority is Suicide Prevention.



Chaplain Marvin L. Mills, Sr.
President, NBCA

- ▶ 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. As always, volunteers are sought to assist with various elements of the conference planning and its implementation.

Your President,

Marvin L. Mills, Sr.

Marvin L. Mills, Sr.

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

Happy New Year to The Capsule Family. I pray that each of you will be blessed during the holiday season. Join us as we celebrate our **3rd Anniversary** of The Capsule. I want to thank our membership, writers, newsletter staff, and global readership for making the newsletter a success. As the new year begins, my prayer is that God will meet your needs and bless you to be a blessing all year long.

Our last issue featured a summary of the 29th Annual National VA Black Chaplain's Conference in Washington DC. This 3rd year Anniversary issue will focus on the writings of various chaplains from across the country sharing their experiences and reflections while at the conference. The theme of this conference was: **"Chaplaincy Leadership Training: In the Time of Crisis."** Some of the topics that you will enjoy are: The Challenges of the Native Americans, The Impact of the Smithsonian Museum, Power of Diversity, PAIRS, Suicide Prevention, In Times of Crisis Poem, Reflections of the Conferences by 1st timers, A Discussion about the War Horse Treatment Program/PTSD and the Reflections of a message delivered by Rear Admiral Barry C. Black. Read it with an open heart and mind.



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

"Difficult roads often lead to Beautiful Destinations."
-Unknown -



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)

More Highlights From the 2019 NBCA Annual Conference

SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES OF THE NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN IN THE VA

by Chaplain Rev. Annamae Taubeneck, Menlo Park, CA



Níá:wen/Thank you to Chaplain Marvin Mills for inviting me to be a guest speaker at the DVA National Black Chaplains Association, 29th Training Conference, and, thank you to all the members of the association for your warm welcome, generosity, and hospitality. It was a joy to meet you and to learn about your ministries within the VA.

Níá:wen/Thank you to Chaplain Mills for inviting me to address the “Challenges Facing American Indian Veterans and American Indian Chaplains.” I had the honor of presenting on a panel with Ms. Stephanie Birdwell, VA Director of the Office of Tribal Government Relations, and Rear Admiral Chris Buchanan, Deputy Director of the Indian Health Service, an agency within the Department of Health and Human Services. The topic is daunting, given the vast differences – in culture, ethnicity and language – among the 573 federally recognized American Indian nations across the United States. So, for this article I would like to address a systemic challenge that each of you encounter at your respective VA facilities and directly impacts your ability to determine if there are any American Indian Veterans within your medical system.

Native American as a Religious Preference: The VA’s standardized list of religious codes in the VistA system includes “Native American Code 30.” As with all other religion names and codes, Native American Code 30 is a *religious preference* and not an indication of ethnicity or race. Therefore, when generating a VistA report based on religious preference the report may or may not capture all of the Native American Veterans currently in the VA system or within your respective facilities.

Capturing an accurate accounting of Native American Veterans is a complex issue. A race or ethnic census may undercount Native Americans due to a variety of factors including but not limited to: data entry error, failure to collect the information, patient refusal to provide the information, subjective use of personal observations by those recording data based on stereotypes, tribal enrollment status versus self-identification, and misclassification into other categories based on surnames.

For religious preference, some Native American Veterans identify as 1) traditional, 2) Christian, or 3) a combination of both. Currently the VistA system is not designed to accommodate those who choose a combination of Native American traditional practices and Christianity and therefore only one religious preference is recorded. This may mean that a Native American Veterans’ spiritual needs are only partially met.

If you have the opportunity to meet with an American Indian Veteran, either individually or in a group, please ask them the following questions: *Do you consent to list your religious preference as “Native American” with the VA? Yes or No?* If the Veteran consents, please have their electronic medical record in VistA updated to reflect their preference.

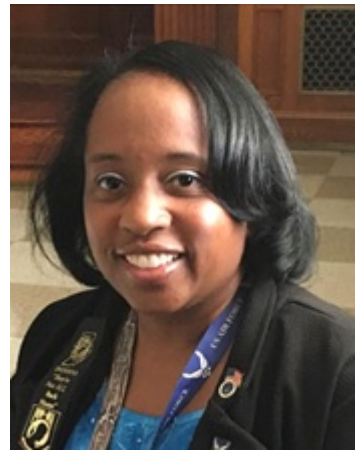
Níá:wen/Thank you and *Skennen'ko:wa*/Great Peace be with you. I hope this information has been helpful and useful.



WE HAVE JOURNEYED A MIGHTY LONG WAY

by Chaplain Elder Sherri L. Headen, Indianapolis, IN

The 2019 VA National Black Chaplain's Association Annual Training Conference took place in Washington, D.C. July 10-13, 2019. The opening activity was a tour of the National Museum of African American History and Culture. As two of my fellow VA Chaplain colleagues and I entered the elevator that transported us to the lowest level of the museum, my mind filled with wonder and excitement. I wondered why we needed to begin in the basement of the museum. I noticed that as the elevator dropped lower and lower, the lighting continued to dim, and the music playing faintly in the elevator became more solemn. My curiosity heightened. When we exited the elevator, the volume of the music seemed to slightly increase while dim lighting pervaded the entire exhibit area of the lowest level. My colleague who had visited this museum a few months prior explained that starting on the lowest level was akin to exploring our African American history at its lowest level and that this museum was designed to illustrate our journey.



As we walked through the *Slavery and Freedom* exhibits, covering the 1400s-1800s, I saw numerous artifacts, historical captions, and other displays from different regions of Africa involved in the Transatlantic slave trade and the disturbing atrocities. I also saw how the United States profited from the slave trade, making millions of dollars that jump started and sustained the nation's wealth. The looming darkness on this bottom level and the poignant reminders of my ancestors' suffering was almost suffocating emotionally. I don't know what the curators had in mind, but I know what entered my mind, and my heart felt a range of emotion from anger and sadness to pride as we traversed briskly through this exhibit level to higher levels.

Towards the exit of this level, the music transitioned from solemn to uplifting Negro spirituals. Spirituals were songs with hidden messages of freedom that allowed the slaves to communicate with each other about their plans to escape from the master's clutches without his knowledge. These spirituals reminded me of our ancestors like Harriet Tubman who in the 1860s made 19 trips into the South and escorted over 300 slaves to freedom on the Underground Railroad! Walking through the freedom exhibits strengthened my heart as I contemplated the tenacity and courage of those whose shoulders I stand. Unfortunately, our time was limited to two hours, so we did not linger long in the exhibit areas on this level.

The next level of exhibits marked the *Era of Segregation* from 1877-1968. The lighting began to brighten a little more as we entered the Civil War and Emancipation exhibits. The lights were still dim in the era of segregation. Jim Crow exhibit displayed a similar darkness in African American history to slavery, although slight progress was being made, represented by the *Spirit of Tuskegee* biplane that hung overhead in honor of the Tuskegee airmen who fought in WWII. Only one exhibit brought tears to my eyes in this era, which was the exhibit of 14-year old Emmett Till. He was brutally and unjustly lynched in Mississippi in 1955 by white supremacists for a crime he did not commit. This exhibit was a vivid reminder of the hateful brutality in humanity. Though time was short, my colleagues and I could not resist standing in the long line for this exhibit. The quote from Till's mother, Mamie Till-Mobley, saying, "I want the world to see this because, there is no way I could tell this story and give them the visual picture of what my son looked like," immediately reminded me of the gruesome photos of Emmett Till's body in his casket that I first saw in the *Eyes on the Prize* documentary. Although the photos were not part of the Till exhibit, their images will forever be etched on my mind. The light was dim, still it continued to brighten as African Americans thrust forward in the fight for civil rights and equality in our nation.

The third level marked the era of *A Changing America*, 1968 and beyond. Brighter lights illuminated familiar displays from the Civil Rights movement. I was able to hear one of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speeches in one

exhibit area and Mahalia Jackson singing in another. The lighting continued to brighten, and the music reflected African American progression through history as the freedom fight marched on. African Americans were breaking down barriers through new legislation, appointments to political positions, and excellence in entertainment, sports, academia, corporate America, science, medicine, the Arts and so on.

At the Culture Galleries on Level L4 of the museum, the sun shone brightly through the windows. By the time I got there, my pride in my ancestors' motivation, tenacity, strength and wherewithal to overcome was overflowing. From the depths of the slave ship through the inauguration of the first African American President of the United States of America, I felt pride and deeply resonated with Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Harvard University Professor of African and African American history, who said, quoting his ancestor, "We come from people".

In the *Capsule* article I wrote prior to the DVA National Black Chaplains Association Conference, I was in high anticipation of our visit to this museum. I was *not* disappointed! My goal was to gain greater understanding about how our challenges and triumphs, the collective consciousness of ourselves and others, our community, faith, and worldview all shape our community at large. This museum provided a wealth of historical information on all eras of African American history to the present that left me feeling validated and affirmed by our collective witness in every generation. If time would have permitted, I would have asked and explored the curator/historian's perspective of how African American history informs the state of African American life and culture today.



In theological reflection, however, one might ask how does the utilization of this knowledge inform the professional chaplain's clinical pastoral practice? Well, I'm sure the answer is written in a dissertation somewhere. However, one thing I have learned is that neither the African American nor any other cultural group is homogeneous. Every people group, cultural context, community, and family system have unique and challenging circumstances within their history that continue to shape collective and single identities today. As a clinical chaplain, I am not addressing the needs of a person who exists in a vacuum, rather the spiritual needs of a person whose ancestry, culture, faith community, and environmental system have a direct effect on who they are. Gaining a better understanding of the cultural complexities of individuals may assist the clinical chaplain in meeting the veteran/ patients, their loved ones, and staff where they are.

In closing, I leave the readers with this reflective question. How will knowledge of your own personal cultural history inform your role and clinical practice as a professional chaplain?

THE POWER OF DIVERSITY

by Chaplain Rev. Dr. Lorna P. Graham, Boston, MA



Oftentimes when we hear the term *diversity*, we interpret it in the prism of race and gender and exclude its broader and more comprehensive meaning, such as our religious identity, culture, personalities, values, thoughts, communication styles, giftings, skillsets, physical abilities and disabilities. All of which adds a new perspective or challenges a new approach to patient care that promotes respect, acceptance, and collaboration among teams to uncover new ideas, explore various treatment modalities to care for the unique needs of the sick, and pool our resources to build a reputation of knowledge, excellence and confidence on a subject of study through professional certification.

Diversity embraces all facets of our development and learning and life. It is crucial for team building. Scripture informs us that Jesus was the architect of diversity. His team came from diverse occupational backgrounds, of different temperaments and even with questionable character, yet they were all valuable and played an instrumental role in the fulfillment of a common objective. That was my

experience at the 29th VA National Black Chaplain Training, the diversity of “gifts” came together and imparted knowledge, stimulated interest and motivated action to influence the health care of Native American veterans, on how to approach Pain Management & the Opioids Crisis among veterans, explore opportunities in health and wholeness such as incorporating the Saratoga War Horse Program as part of our patients spiritual care plan when practical. The diversity of gifts deepened further during the worship experience.

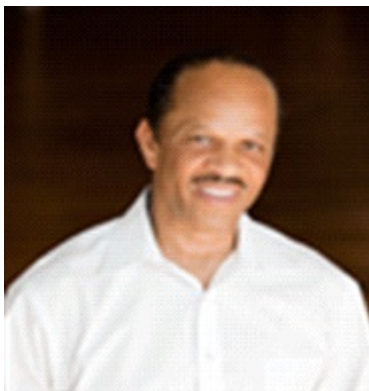
Key take-aways were the Equine Therapy as valuable coping mechanism for veterans dealing with PTSD, depression and other combat traumas; for its effectiveness in restoring trust and improving veteran’s emotional intelligence in that it increases emotional awareness, helps veterans understand the meaning of their emotions and the ability to manage their situation. The presentation on Native American Affairs brought an awareness of the diversity of cultures, history, spirituality, and their growing health care concerns.

With the advancement in telemedicine delivery systems, Chaplains were encouraged to be mindful and not overlook the gift of human connection. Since the common need of veterans, especially those who are homeless, battling alcohol and substance use and other mental health issues, is community, *connection* can be the missing ingredient for winning their battle. Chaplains were challenged to be proactive and request a seat at the table of spiritual/ holistic care discussions and adopt or develop a language of spirituality in our practice, while honoring the existential and mystical methods of pastoral care. With the changing tide in Chaplaincy theory and modern progression, clinging to tradition can only lead to irrelevance. A biblical model of leadership requires the skill of adaptability; to serve all breadths of our world, *becoming all things to all people* in the interest of saving lives (1 Corinthians 9 verse 19-23).



It is stated that *Attention is the Currency of Leadership*. In this climate of change, the membership was encouraged to pay attention to the present human condition, be adaptable, strategic, and purposeful in gaining new cutting-edge skills and competence in dealing with the diverse health care needs within the veteran community. The cost of inattention, idleness or leisure is the opportunity to impact health care delivery systems for veterans in their time of crisis. Diversity is a powerful tool critical for leaders to become familiar and integrate in pastoral care.

At the VA Boston Health Care System, I serve on the mental health team and lead weekly spirituality groups with Women in Treatment and Recovery Program dealing with issues associated with alcohol and opioid use disorder and factors associated with relapse. The Chaplaincy Leadership Training challenged me to pay attention to the pervasive drug addiction epidemic and Opioid-involved crisis in the U.S. My plan of action was to enroll in an Addiction Counseling Education Program. Classes begin in the Fall at the University of Massachusetts. My objective is to be a Certified Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselor and to integrate the knowledge, different treatment modalities and counseling techniques learned into my administration of patient care, and to become a subject matter expert on the topic. Classes are scheduled to begin in the Fall of 2019 at the University of Massachusetts.



WARHORSE TREATMENT PROGRAM/PTSD

by Chaplain Rev. Dr. Phillip D. Williams, Palo Alto, CA

During the 2019 Conference of Black VA Chaplains, I was asked to lead a discussion in a discussion on the *Philosophy, Mission, and Vision* of the Saratoga Warhorse initiative. This program is designed to “improve the physical, mental, and emotional health of veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress by providing a healing, equine-assisted experience utilizing off-the-track Thoroughbreds.” The no-cost WarHorse program <https://www.saratogawarhorse.org/> offers all veterans who are experiencing the dark side of military service (PTSD) the opportunity for a brighter future apart from the daily aggravation of PTSD. The online video conveys the impressive dynamic display of the WarHorse’s connection with the PTSD laden veteran as each senses the other’s need for comfort and companionship. Noteworthy was the horse’s non-judgmental, non-confrontational approach to the agonizing veteran as the two merge in partnership.

During the discussion, I focused on the often expressed miss-conceptions and ill-defined types and causes of psychological and emotional disorders. Based on my on-going research at the VA Palo Alto Health Care Center in partnership with Stanford University, I shared some points of consideration to help promote and clarify the definition of depression, which I call the gateway to suicide. Those dealing with grief and PTSD have often been misdiagnosed with depression. Although similar in expression, depression and PTSD are different. When attempting to heal disruptions of the mind and emotions, we cannot properly address them without clear definitions. The following definitions helped promote the subject matter discussed.

Depression:

A mood disorder

The theme is one of sadness

A traumatic event may have happened

(Note: Those who experience and or witness a life-threatening event can be diagnosed with PTSD. However, not all who undergo such events develop PTSD. Sometimes an individual may have both conditions.)

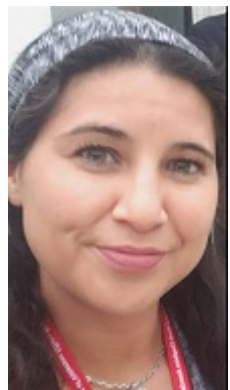
PTSD:

Anxiety disorder

The theme is one of fear and nervousness

A traumatic event is required in the diagnosis

This introduction of the above and other relative information sparked a very lively, passionate, and intellectual conversation which enlightened and refined participants for the proper identification and treatment of PTSD. The time of sharing gave way to the greater need for the WarHorse program and others like it to meet the pressing needs and treatment of veterans facing PTSD's dark side.



FROM THE EYES OF A PAIRS MASTER TRAINER TO CHAPLAIN

by Julie Macias, Dania Beach, FL

So honored I was to find myself in a room full of similarly aligned individuals, people who had long walked the journey of helping, bringing healing, comfort, and love to others, and dedicating their lives to this. As a **PAIRS** (*Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills*) Master Trainer and **PBFF** (*Purpose Built Families Foundation*) Program Director, I attended the National Black Chaplains Association Conference eager to share, alongside Chaplain Dwight Webster, the Warrior to Soul Mate curriculum which has brought healing to so many around the world, with its specific focus on our Veteran community. From beginning to end, this experiential relationship skills class teaches couples and individuals how to create a safe space where strong

bonding relationships could flourish and times of sadness, confusion, frustration within a relationship could gradually diminish.

Within a very short time, a 9-, 12-, or 18-hour class, graduates of this class have seen positive lasting effects in their lives and relationships. The Department of Veterans Affairs conducted its very own Return on Investment, and, after purchasing the curriculum last year, set a goal and a Directive to have it available for every Veteran family at VA facilities across the nation. Through several studies, testimonials, and evaluations conducted on the lasting effects of this curriculum, they find that it increases resiliency after trauma. It increases social supports and quality of life, and along with it, overall health. It decreases family breakdowns and suicidality, which, sadly, are both far too common within our Veteran community. With the help of Chaplain Dwight Webster, I wanted to bring this curriculum in a very real way to this group and everyone who has people and families that look to them for help and guidance.

After reviewing some of the specific language that people learn through this class in order to better communicate and identify their own feelings for themselves and others, Chaplain Dwight Webster and I jumped into the experiential learning. Being that we were with a group of Chaplains fluent in speaking about feelings and secure with natural human vulnerabilities, Chaplain Webster and I decided to prepare everyone for an advanced exercise called Emptying the Emotional Jug. Everyone was divided into pairs. It was wondrous to see a group active in self-discovery and ready to learn about a program they could bring into their lives and their Veterans' lives. It was experiential. It was emotional. It was successful!

Warrior to Soul Mate is exactly that; learning to handle emotions in a careful manner by actually putting it into practice. It is creating a habit, starting with small issues and one issue at a time. It is about finding success

in communicating one exercise at a time. It has simple step-by-step exercises that anybody can do and practice right in the class. It teaches how to slow down in a moment of intense emotions. It teaches that moment of pause; the fork in the road, when each of us decides how we are going to react next.

From learning more about communication (and listening for others to confide) to navigating conflict to an even deeper level of emotional intelligence, Warrior to Soul Mate takes an individual or couple on a journey that uncovers self, other, and self and other within a relationship. It has brought and kept families together, provided the safety net of a support network, and taught how to create safety and long-lasting happiness and the feeling of love in a relationship. This curriculum is for everybody, of any creed, any gender, any race, culture, persuasion, etc. There is not a person out there who would not benefit from this if open to it, and for every single person and family that benefits, the whole community benefits. I hope that everyone reading this takes action to learn more “on behalf of a safer, saner, more loving world” for everyone.

Julie Macias, MSW, PAIRS Master Trainer - working with Carrfour Supportive Housing as Acting Director for Coalition LIFT, a supportive housing community with a research component for individuals who have been chronically homeless and the highest utilizers of social supports, and Acting Director for Dr. Barbara Carey-Shuler Manor Supportive Housing Community for formerly homeless veterans and low-income families and households.



SUICIDE PREVENTION

by Chief Chaplain Rev. Sherman Baker, Reno, NV

On an average day somewhere in some location, a veteran tries to commit suicide. The VA says over 20 veterans a day die of suicide. Suicide attempts are rising and have risen over the last years. We are also seeing a rise in suicides in communities. Failed personal relationships, mental health challenges, legal and financial problems, the stress of life, and living are factors motivating our veterans to commit suicides. Suicide is often a compulsive act in which one does not process his or her feelings, thoughts and fears.

About a quarter of those who die of suicide had a history of at least one psychiatric disorder. Of those, about 20 percent had been diagnosed with a mood disorder such as bipolar disorder or depression, and 8 percent had been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which is one of the signature injuries of war.

As a 30-year Army chaplain veteran, my first commander asked me to put together a suicide prevention plan for his soldiers. At that time, I did not have a clue why someone would want to die of suicide. So, off to work I went. I met with other chaplains and our mental health officer and we designed a suicide prevention program for our unit. Unbeknownst to me, I became the unit suicide prevention officer. It was my job to teach and to brief suicide prevention. As I progressed in my chaplaincy career, the suicide prevention curriculum became more in depth and interactive.

There are two suicide prevention program that stand out that I continue to use this day. The first one is called ACE. ACE is the base program for all Department of Defense personnel. The ACE program is a suicide prevention, awareness, and intervention training focused around the three keywords: Ask, Care, and Escort. We were taught to ask if a person is feeling suicidal, to demonstrate care for that person, and to escort the at-risk person to the appropriate professional for intervention and help.

The second program is Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) which is a two-day course designed to train participants in suicide prevention first aid and prepare participants to de-escalate the situation, develop an appropriate intervention plan, and ensure that appropriate follow-up treatment. The target audiences for ASIST are primary and secondary gatekeepers. Primary gatekeepers are identified as chaplains.

Current VA chaplains are taught to use SafeTALK Suicide Prevention resources. SafeTALK is a half-day training program that teaches participants to recognize and engage persons who might have thoughts of suicide and to connect them with community resources trained in suicide intervention. SafeTALK stresses safety while challenging taboos that inhibit open talk about suicide. The program recommends that an ASIST-trained facilitator



facilitate all training. The 'safe' of SafeTALK stands for 'suicide alertness for everyone'. The 'TALK' letters stand for the practice actions that one does to help those with thoughts of suicide: Tell, Ask, Listen, and KeepSafe.

Relationships are one of the major learning points in suicide prevention. Relationships are about being connected and being connected is about being in relationships. People look at PTSD, mental illnesses and multiple deployments to war zones. It is not that it is that broken relationship that really makes the differences. To reduce suicides, we must connect with one another. When veterans return home or when their military days are over, they need to find a VA healthcare system that is willing to connect with them so that they will not give up or give in. Suicide does not have to be the end. We can all help prevent someone from dying of suicide.

REFLECTIONS ON REAR ADMIRAL BARRY C. BLACK OF THE US SENATE MESSAGE

by Chief Chaplain Rev. Dr. Bennie L. Oliphant, Louisville, KY

Retired Rear Admiral Barry C. Black of the US Senate was the guest speaker for the Department of Veterans Affairs National Black Chaplain Association Annual Prayer Breakfast in Washington DC. Chaplain Black captivated the audience when he stood and declared *I am forced to do ministry in troubled times*. The room was immediately filled with the spirit because most folk, if not all, are forced to do ministry in troubled times. His opening statement connected and joined us with him in a spiritual journey to seek out means for *Winning in Troubled Times*.



First, Chaplain Black's message calls out leaders to discern the true role of leadership. He embraces the idea that *Winning in Troubled Times* calls for leaders with influence because *leadership is influence*. His rationale is that no matter who wears the leadership label the leader is always the one with the most influence. All too often leaders may have nothing more than a rock and a rag, but all in all, they have a way of influencing others to follow. King Saul was rich but his leadership was by title only whereas David was poor but his leadership was driven by influence with God and man. This message inspires me to be better at discerning my leadership role and influence for *Winning in Troubled Times*.

Secondly, Chaplain Black believes leadership is *knowing how to win*. He suggests that like David we must understand that winning in troubled times will require being equipped with anointed weapons. He shares a powerful testimony about how prayer and Scripture changed his life and strongly recommends praying without ceasing "*for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God, for pulling down strongholds*" (2 Corinthians 10:4). I listened as he exegeted James 1:5 which invites *those that lack wisdom in knowing how to win to ask of God who gives liberally to all and does not scold*. I feel inspired to be a better prayer warrior because prayer "stupid proofs" your life and motivates you to go forth in troubled times. I am motivated to revise my prayer posture from driving to kneeling. I like Chaplain Black's idea of making an altar in his walk in the closet but I do not have that luxury in my Louisville apartment. But, I have a spot where *I can lift my hands, and bow my knees, and worship at his throne and say I need you Lord, right now!*

Thirdly, Chaplain Black declares *I am forced to do the ministry in troubled times, so I need to find allies*. A biblical example of a need to find allies is demonstrated as King Saul fumed because Israel praised David for defeating Goliath and the Philistine army. Saul became possessed by a spirit of jealousy that influenced him to murder David, but God blocked it. Saul's son Jonathan and his daughter Michal became David's allies as they witnessed the activity of the Holy Spirit working in the life of God's anointed leader. Since returning home from the training conference, I have been more cognizant of the fact that the Holy Spirit is my greatest ally. I have been spending quality time on my knees and reading James 1:5 and Luke 11:13 in conjunction with other Scripture. Black recommends daily engagement of these life changing passages as he has done for fifty-years. He believes they will influence the Holy Spirit to make your enemy a foot stool.

Finally, though *I am forced to do ministry in troubled times*, the Holy Spirit knows how to win. I know "*the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God, for pulling down strongholds*." I understand that I am winning in troubled times because the Holy Spirit is my ally.

IN TIMES OF CRISIS POEM

by Chaplain Rev. Pauline R. Moore, Lebanon, PA

Some people lose their minds in times of crisis,
Because somehow they forgot just who Christ-is.

They make excuses why their sight is,

Laser focused on,

Trivial issues that won't change the way that, Life is, For people of color.

Black,

Brown,

Red,

Yellow,

And sometimes White-ish,

Matter to the One who created and continues to love mankind despite this, Truth.

Our biases keep us from seeing anyone who is, Different from us.

This perfect loving God is,

Still waiting,

Waiting,

Waiting for you and I to align with,

The words written in multiple languages, Versions and prints,

This Bible that invites us, Into communion with Him, But see, There is, One problem.

Some people lose their minds in times of crisis, Because somehow they forgot just who Christ-is.

They make excuses why their sight is,

Laser focused on,

Trivial issues that won't change the way that, Life is, For people of color.

Black,

Brown,

Red,

Yellow,

and sometimes White-ish,

Matter to the One who created and continues to love mankind despite this, Truth.

Our biases keep us from seeing anyone who is, Different from us.

This perfect loving God is,

Still waiting,

Waiting,

Waiting for you and I to rid ourselves of defiance and noncompliance, With, His, Her, Their, Divine Purpose,

For us to bear one another's cross and spread the love of God,

Through the gospel of Jesus Christ, To one another through the Holy Spirit, WHO's inside us.

(Copyright 2019)



A Tale of Two First Time Attendees

MY FIRST VA NATIONAL BLACK CHAPLAIN CONFERENCE

by Chaplain Rev. Joao C. Teixeira, New Haven, CT

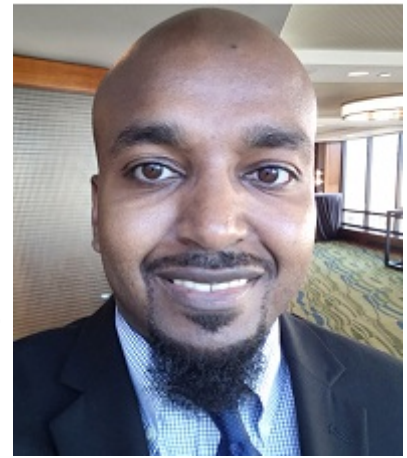
As I sit here and reflect on the experience I had at my first VA Black National Chaplains Association conference, I smile. I also smile as I think about the extravagant welcome I received. I felt a sense of connection from the moment I arrived and met one of the chaplains, Dr. Phillip Williams from Palo Alto, CA, who had been very helpful and encouraging to me. I was excited that the president, Chaplain Marvin Mills, saw fit to introduce me, not only as a Chaplain Fellow, but as a new member of the association. That meant a lot to me because I feel so honored to be a part of the wonderful black and brown women and men who make a difference in the lives of veterans every day. Every member with whom I had the pleasure of speaking, inspired me in one way or another, and for that I am grateful.

In terms of the theme of "Leadership," I appreciate the ways in which every presenter approached this theme from their various perspectives. Whether chaplain, professor, lawmaker, or other discipline, the speakers emphasized leading with excellence. Some speakers even preached as if it were Sunday morning at somebody's "Bapti-costal" church, and it made my spirit glad. In whichever way the presenters presented, they did it so eloquently, and they inspired and motivated me. In addition, Chaplain Dallas Jones' singing truly uplifted me. I enjoyed all of the topics, and particularly appreciated hearing the more serious ones about Suicide Prevention and the opioid addiction crisis.

Food for the mind and soul were filling, and I must say that food for the body was amazing. My belly was happy and full. It is imperative for humans to eat a well-balanced meal in order to be healthy and function properly. I thoroughly enjoyed the meal, and so I would be remiss if I failed to share with you how scrumptious the meals were.

Next, it would be difficult to say what I enjoyed most because every part of the experience was amazing. However, I will say that it was wonderful to network with people from all over the country. I enjoyed being around such rich history, education, and love. The people gave me hope. Chaplain Juliana Leshner also gave me hope that Saturday morning at the final meeting. It was a word that I needed right then and there.

I would encourage chaplains, particularly chaplains of color, to consider becoming a part of the VA Black Chaplains Association. I believe that we can all benefit from what the Association has to offer. In addition, we can continue to research and provide training on topics that are relevant to Black veterans. While there are many similar needs that all veterans have, we cannot deny that veterans of color experience many racial disparities. I believe that veterans who join the Association can help us address the aforementioned and other issues.



MY FIRST VA NATIONAL BLACK CHAPLAINS CONFERENCE

by Chaplain Elder LaToya T. Smith, Leavenworth, KS

My first experience at the VA National Black Chaplains Conference was amazing! I know there are more words I could use to describe my experience, but "amazing" is what it was. Though it was only a 3-day event, it was a power packed 3-day event.

When I first arrived there, everyone was already in the flow of the conference. I felt a little disconnected at first because I did not know where everyone was until after I checked into the hotel. and contacted Chaplain Gerard Miller. He and I had been communicating over the phone from the time I was looking for employment within the VA in 2017, to present time. When we finally met in person, we both started laughing and of course, he was extremely country and loud. All I could see were teeth and all I could hear was a loud voice saying, hey... sista! But honestly, it was great to finally meet him in person. I did see Chaplain Mills when I was checking in, which was comforting as well, because he was the

chief, while I was going through my CPE internship at Perry Point VA.

I lived in the Washington, DC, Maryland, and Virginia (DMV) area, after getting married. I did my CPE residency at the MedStar Washington Hospital, so I was not concern about the location, but I was worried whether I would see anyone once I arrived.

After connecting with Chaplain Miller and a female chaplain named Jarda Alexander, we decided to get something to eat. When we arrive at the restaurant, we noticed it was closed due to rain damage. After realizing the place was closed, the taxi driver stated he would take us somewhere else if we gave him a bigger tip. I thought to myself, wow, he tried to hustle Miller. Realizing we were not going to get a ride to another restaurant (at least not without paying another fare or giving a much larger tip) we walked to another restaurant. Chaplain Miller was leading us (LOL... what a journey that was). With sweat on our face and our feet throbbing like crazy, at least mine was, we finally finished our 10-mile walk, we saw it was the wrong restaurant (the GPS had not been updated). All I could think of is, sweet Jesus help me, what was I thinking allowing Miller to give me a tour around DC. Thank God Chaplain Jarda Alexander had a friend to us up and drive us to another restaurant. After arriving to the restaurant, we learned seating was mainly by reservation. After about 40 minutes, I decided to return to the hotel and get something to eat within the hotel, which by the way, I found to be very delicious and worth the money. My first day was interesting, but it was the beginning of new friendships and memories with other VA African American Chaplains.

Ok I'll start with my bad experiences during the conference....so are you ready to read about my bad experiences? Yes, with an s. Aside from the first day adventure, the other was at the registration table. I was asked to come to the table, and then I was asked to back up from the table. I thought to myself, this guy is on a power trip at a registration table (LOL. Yes, I was thinking this). After talking to him and cracking a few jokes, I found him to be a wonderful person. Lastly, the interesting presentation, Warrior to Soulmate program. I did not understand the whole picture of the program, but after sorting out my own misunderstandings, and after listening to those who had been educated on the program, I found the true meaning behind the program. I still have some opinions, but I get it.

Some of the best experiences I had were hearing and seeing some of the most amazing, well-educated African American speakers. Listening to the sermons, was an experience which left a lasting impression. To meet and heard Chaplain Matthew Zimmerman, and Chaplain Barry Black speak was so inspiring and encouraging. As I listened to them, I thought to myself there would have been no other way I would have had this opportunity, except through this conference, which God had ordained for me. The banquet was beautiful, the food was delicious, but the fellowship, for me, was the best part of the banquet. During this time, I also had the wonderful opportunity to meet my dear friend Chaplain Alfray Thomas, who encouraged me during a bumpy time in one of my VA chaplaincy encounters.

I had the wonderful opportunity of attending the ceremony for the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the Changing of the Guard, at the Arlington National Cemetery. I was also able see the Chaplain's Hill burial site, where fallen chaplains are buried. What an honor! Thank you, Chaplain Mills and staff.

As I stated the last day of the conference, with tears building up in my eyes, this was an amazing experience I will never forget. I feel and believe the sky is the limit for me as a chaplain in the VA. With all the knowledge I received and through the friendships I made, I truly feel this is only going to get bigger and greater for us all. Thank you for such a wonderful and memorable time at the VANBCA 2019 conference. I look forward to seeing you all again at the VANBCA 2020 conference!



**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 3044
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 NBCA?

- ▶ 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 NBCA to make their communities better, especially those with veterans.
- ▶ To sponsor those individuals who have a financial hardship to conferences hosted by the NBCA.

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.