



# THE CLERGY CONNECTION

April 2017

*Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does. ~ William James*

*"I feel like I've lost my sense of grace about myself and the world," Walt said in one of our psychotherapy sessions. "I don't belong here anymore. I don't fit. I don't deserve God's love."*

*~ From War and the Soul, Edward Tick*

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as a diagnosable condition, first existed in 1980. It has been studied as an anxiety-based condition since that time. Recently, the construct of moral injury has begun to gain attention as a factor also often associated with PTSD. The key precondition for moral injury is an act of transgression, which shatters moral and ethical expectations that are rooted in religious or spiritual beliefs, or culture-based, organizational, and group-based rules about fairness, the value of life, and so forth (Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder).



This issue of *The Clergy Connection* will begin to explore some of the relationships between spirituality, moral injury, and posttraumatic stress disorder. ☞



The mission of the National Center for PTSD is to advance the clinical care and social welfare of America's Veterans and others who have experienced trauma, or who suffer from PTSD, through research, education, and training in the science, diagnosis, and treatment of PTSD and stress-related disorders. The National Center has emerged as the world's leading research and educational center of excellence on PTSD.

The National Center for PTSD website contains a special section of information for clergy. Topics addressed include spirituality and trauma, guilt and moral injury, and grief and bereavement. The **Spirituality and Trauma: Professionals Working Together** section also addresses the role of spirituality in recovery and the importance of pastoral care and mental health professionals working together to incorporate a survivor's spiritual beliefs and practices into PTSD treatment.

Learn more at: [www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/provider-type/community/fs-spirituality.asp](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/provider-type/community/fs-spirituality.asp) ☞



*The Clergy Connection* is a publication of the National VA Chaplain Center Community Clergy Training to Support Rural Veterans Mental Health, a Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Rural Health Enterprise-wide Initiative. For more information, contact: Chaplain Keith Ethridge, [Keith.Ethridge@va.gov](mailto:Keith.Ethridge@va.gov).



## Did You Know?

Spiritual well-being may be defined as a sense of peace and contentment stemming from an individual's relationship with the spiritual aspects of life. It is a satisfaction that we have found the uniqueness in the world we were intended to be. Healthy spirituality is associated with a high quality of life while a diagnosis of PTSD tends to be associated with a lower quality of life.

In 2008, research found a relationship between spiritual struggle and PTSD. The researchers assessed the exposure to traumatic and non-traumatic events of college freshmen, degree of spiritual struggle related to the most stressful event, and the symptoms of PTSD resulting from the event. Several sub-scales of a spirituality inventory predicted worse PTSD symptoms:

- Seeing God as a punishing deity,
- Reappraisal of God's powers, and
- Spiritual discontentment. (Nad *et al.*, 2011)

Religious well-being has been found to predict lower tendencies toward suicide (Wortmann *et al.*, 2011). When you meet those suffering from PTSD, spiritual assistance and support in these areas may produce a higher quality of life and may reduce tendencies toward suicide.

### Want to know more?

- Nad, S, Marcinko, D, Vuksan-AEusa, B, Jakovijevic, M, & Jakovijevic, G. (2011). Spiritual well-being, intrinsic religiosity, and suicidal behavior in predominantly Catholic Croatian in veterans with chronic posttraumatic stress disorder: A case control study. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 196 (1), 79-83.
- Wortmann, J, Park, C, & Edmondson, D. (2011). Trauma and PTSD Symptoms: Does spiritual struggler mediate the link? *Psychological Trauma*, 3(4), 442-452. 

### Questions to Consider

1. Suppose that a female, Jewish Veteran has just disclosed to you that she has lost her interest in a faith that used to be vibrant before her war experience. How might you proceed with her?



2. An airman, a man of Christian faith before his tours in Afghanistan, has been referred to you by his wife. He is no longer interested in worship. In talking with him, he states, "I know that God has damned me to hell for what I have done and I am afraid. Help me pastor!" What will be your first statement to this man? How will you proceed? What are your own feelings about engaging with this man? What do you hope to accomplish in the first session?
3. How would you assess religious well-being?



**Coaching Into Care** is a free telephone-based program that helps a caller figure out how to motivate a Veteran to seek services. It provides "coaching" for family and friends of Veterans who see that a Veteran in their life needs help. This service, developed by VA, is provided by licensed clinical social workers and psychologists.

**Toll-Free Phone #:** 1-888-823-7458

**Website:** [www.mirecc.va.gov/coaching/index.asp](http://www.mirecc.va.gov/coaching/index.asp)



## Community Clergy Training to Support Rural Veterans Mental Health

Now available nationwide! Be our Partner!

### Many Veterans and their family members seek help from clergy.

Clergy members and houses of worship are a trusted resource and an important and often first-line contact point for Veterans seeking help; especially in rural areas where access to mental health services may be limited or non-existent. Many Veterans and active duty service members feel that seeking help from clergy will have less negative impact on their reputation in the community and with their peers. Clergy provide anonymity and confidentiality and there is less stigma associated with seeking counseling from the faith community for issues such as posttraumatic stress, depression, or difficulty with the transition from military to civilian life.

### JOIN THE CCTP TEAM

As a CCTP partner, you can bring the National VA Chaplain Center's facilitated training events to your rural community and provide clergy with valuable knowledge about the unique health issues and readjustment difficulties common to returning warriors. You can help build a network of support that serves and strengthens Veterans and their families.

**VA Chaplain Facilitators will bring CCTP training events to your rural community at no cost. They will work with you on the planning process to identify an optimal training space, promote the event, recruit participants, and facilitate the interactive CCTP training.**

### CCTP Training Modules Include:

- Military and civilian culture conflict and the challenges of readjusting to civilian life
- Common combat and military service-related health concerns
- Pastoral care for Veterans and their families.
- Working with VA and community mental health care providers
- Building a network of community support for Veterans and service members



Watch our YouTube video, "Rural Clergy Learns To Connect With Veterans"

<http://go.va.gov/nmsi>

To date, more than 4,000 clergy members, chaplains, behavioral health professionals, and others supporting Veterans in rural communities have participated in a CCTP training event. Live training events enhance the knowledge and skills in recognizing the holistic healthcare needs of Veterans, assisting reintegration into family and community, and increasing clergy referrals to VA or community healthcare and resources.

To learn more about becoming a CCTP Community Clergy Partner visit

[www.patientcare.va.gov/chaplain/clergytraining](http://www.patientcare.va.gov/chaplain/clergytraining),

or contact Chaplain Keith Ethridge, CCTP Program Lead, [Keith.Ethridge@va.gov](mailto:Keith.Ethridge@va.gov), (757) 728-3180. ☎

## Research: Spirituality, Forgiveness and PTSD

In Did You Know? (page 2), it was noted that healthy spirituality is related to a high quality of life (QOL) while PTSD is related to a lower quality of life. Currier et al. (2016) looked at the relationships among spirituality, forgiveness and quality of life. In their research, 678 mostly male Veterans admitted to 60- and 90-day treatment programs served as subjects. Self-report instruments on spirituality, tendency to forgive self/others and acceptance of God's forgiveness, and quality of life were given to each subject during their first week after admission. A summary of the results appears below.

- Symptom severity was associated with poorer QOL.
- Spirituality was associated with higher QOL.
- Forgiveness was associated with higher QOL.

The authors found that "higher levels of spiritual functioning were associated with fewer forgiveness problems among these veterans, and their propensity to forgive self and others was also concurrently linked to QOL.... In addition, we found that this association between spirituality and QOL was fully mediated by veterans' forgiveness at the time of the study."



While it cannot be assumed that higher levels of forgiveness or spirituality caused a higher level of QOL due to the correlative nature of this study, its results are intriguing. A limited array of other research suggests that tendency to forgive is related to fewer mental health problems, higher levels of spirituality, and physical health.

Suppose it is true an increased ability to forgive leads to an increased quality of life. How might you affect a Veteran sitting in your office who suffers from an inability to forgive? Dr. Everett Worthington, psychologist and noted forgiveness researcher, has produced Do-It-

Yourself workbooks to assist individuals in increasing their tendency to forgive. These workbooks can be used with individuals or groups and are excellent resources that encourage forgiving oneself and others.

The Community Clergy Training Program's webinar by Dr. Worthington, "Practical Guidance for Clergy in Teaching Forgiveness of Others and Oneself can be viewed at [chapvaco.adobeconnect.com/p2jv13qthqc](http://chapvaco.adobeconnect.com/p2jv13qthqc).

*"To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you."*

~ Lewis B. Smedes

### Questions to Consider

1. *Think about your own life experience for a moment. What are the five most important things that contribute to your own quality of life?*
2. *We are all injured at times by others. Equally, we all hurt others at times. Such injuries can contribute to a moral injury. From the perspective of your own experiences, do you think that the ability to forgive yourself or another person could increase your quality of life? Why or why not?*
3. *Think about forgiveness over your lifespan. What have you done to try to forgive yourself or others? How effective have your efforts been? How complete is your knowledge of forgiveness?*
4. *How important is it to your own work to be able to forgive yourself or others? Explain. From your perspective, how important is it to be able to help others to forgive?*

### Want to know more?

- ◆ Currier, J, Drescher, K, Holland, J, Lisman, R & Foy, D. (2016) Spirituality, forgiveness, and quality of life: Testing a meditational model with military veterans with PTSD. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*. 26(2), 167-179.
- ◆ DIY Forgiveness Workbooks: [www.evworthington-forgiveness.com/diy-workbooks](http://www.evworthington-forgiveness.com/diy-workbooks).

## Practical Pastoral Tips

Suppose there was a simple thing that you could teach a person diagnosed with PTSD that would reduce symptoms of depression and PTSD and increase satisfaction with physical health and spiritual well-being. Recent research offers a technique that may help.

Silent, frequent repetition of a phrase with spiritual significance is called a *mantra*, an ancient form of prayer that was used to reduce stress and other symptoms.

Oman and Bormann (2015) randomly divided 132 Veterans into two groups. Each member of one group (*mantra* group) chose a short, significant phrase from their faith tradition (e.g., “Jesus”, “Barukh attah Adonai”) and was then taught to repeat the phrase silently throughout each day to interrupt disturbing thoughts related to PTSD and to improve concentration. The second group received no intervention. Veterans were assessed weekly for 6 weeks.

For the *mantra* group, almost linear improvements were seen weekly. At the end of 6 weeks, the *mantra* group showed statistically significant improvements in self-efficacy, depression, PTSD, satisfaction with physical health and spiritual well-being when compared to the control group. An additional study has verified the effectiveness of *mantra*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Are there any concerns or prohibitions in your faith group that might prohibit the use of mantra with Veterans?
2. How would you initiate a conversation that would explain the purpose and potential outcomes of mantra to a Veteran with PTSD?
3. What kind of follow-up would you initiate with a Veteran using mantra?
4. What mantras would you suggest for a Christian? A Jew? A Muslim? An atheist?



### Want to know more?

- ◆ Bormann, J, Liu, L, Thorp, S & Lang, A (2012). Spiritual well-being mediates PTSD change in veterans with military-related PTSD. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*. 19(4), 496-502.
- ◆ Oman, D, & Bormann, J. (2015). Mantram repetition fosters self-efficacy in veterans for managing PTSD: A randomized trial. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 7(1), 34-45. [↻](#)

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## New Resource for Chaplains and Clergy Supporting Veterans with PTSD

Knowing the best way to support Veterans with PTSD can be challenging, especially in light of the vast amount of information in the news and online. If you’ve ever found yourself seeking out advice from colleagues or searching the internet for answers, you now have another option that’s just an e-mail or phone call away. The [PTSD Consultation Program](#) at the National Center for PTSD is a new, free, one-stop resource available to chaplains and clergy members looking for answers about how to support Veterans with PTSD and their families.

The Consultation Program offers free consultation, continuing education, PTSD-related treatment information, and other resources to health professionals

who treat Veterans with PTSD, including chaplains and clergy members. The consultants are psychologists, psychiatrists, and other mental health professionals who have many years of experience treating veterans with PTSD. They are available to consult on just about anything related to Veterans and PTSD and can provide useful resources. No question is too big or small.

If you’re a member of the clergy and have a question about supporting a Veteran with PTSD, contact an expert clinician by emailing [PTSDconsult@va.gov](mailto:PTSDconsult@va.gov) or calling [866-948-7880](tel:866-948-7880). You will typically receive a response within one day. The PTSD Consultation is your knowledgeable, virtual colleague on all PTSD issues. [↻](#)

## A Story for Reflection

*"I was in downtown Saigon. I went to a movie, myself and this Vietnamese lady. We walked downtown to a movie. What reminds me of it here – the Catholic Church, the streets going off to the side. It was the same in Vietnam. I really didn't know the streets went like that until two days ago. In Vietnam, it was a little Catholic Church sitting in the middle of two streets."*

*"This (Buddhist) monk was sitting on the steps of the church with his hands up in prayer. There was a can beside him. He pulled up the can and poured it on him. He took a match and set himself on fire. He never moved or hollered."*

*"I wondered why no one helped. I was scared as hell. I was the only American. Should I have done something? I watched him burn and then he just fell over."*

*"If I go to a Catholic Church or see a fire or hear of someone burning, I remember. He was just burned up. ... We left that scene and were walking down to the movie. A little Vietnamese boy ran up and pulled on my arm. The lady said something and he walked off. A taxi hit him. The lady said, "Come on, come on". I wanted to help. People were pointing their finger at me like I caused it. In Canton, Ohio, I hit a child on a bicycle. He just got up and left. It brought it all back."*

*"I wondered why no one helped. I was scared as hell. I was the only American. Should I have done something? I watched him burn and then he just fell over."*

## Questions to Consider

1. *Triggers* are sensory stimuli that are similar enough to a traumatic event that they stimulate unpleasant memories of the event for those with PTSD. What are the sensory stimuli in this scenario? With traumatic events, sensory stimuli are usually also associated with emotions. What strong emotions would you expect that this warrior might experience with these memories?
2. Guilt and shame are often a factor of doing something that one believes he or she should not have done or not doing something he or she believes should have been done. What are the sources of this warrior's shame and guilt? How would you handle a warrior who presents the above monologue in your office?
3. Given what has been stated by this warrior, what elements of his experience might affect his faith? If you found him avoiding worship, how might you help him? ☺



PTSD Consultation Program  
FOR PROVIDERS WHO TREAT VETERANS

The **PTSD Consultation Program** is a new, free, one-stop resource available to chaplains and clergy members looking for answers about how to support Veterans with PTSD and their families.

Learn more about this program on page 5!

[www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/consult](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/consult)

## Your Story Matters

Spirituality and its relationship to PTSD is a fairly new and important concept and, for that reason, this issue of *The Clergy Connection* has emphasized this topic learning about it. However, another reason to devote an issues to the topic is that Veterans often seek counsel from clergy about spiritual issues related to their military service.

Fully 88.1 % of clergy who completed a CCTP training in 2014 reported having worked with Veterans suffering from moral injury, and 95.2% reported meeting with Veterans with grief or other spiritual concerns related to their military service. More than four out of five clergy members reported they had spent time with Veterans related to problems with combat stress.

**(Continued on page 7)**

## A Community Success Story

Horses For Heroes Cowboy Up! is a cutting edge horsemanship, wellness and skill-set restructuring program. It is free to all post 9/11 Veterans and active military, especially those who have sustained PTSD during their time serving our country. Their essential mission is to see our Veterans integrate into the community once again.

There is no one-size-fits-all PTSD. For some, the first casualty of war is often a wound to the spirit. For others, it may be active combat survival skills, which work well in the field, but at home aren't serving them well. Perhaps the Veteran feels disconnected, dishonored, or depleted. That is why Horses for Heroes calls PTSD Post Traumatic Spiritual Dissonance™.

This "Cowboy up!" program is designed to help Veterans develop new skills, re-sharpen others, and reshape attitudes needed to transition into civilian life. The program assists Veterans to refit, regroup and recalibrate the soul of warriors through the way of the horse.

Native Americans have long believed that horses are a bridge between the physical and spiritual worlds. Standing in the presence of a majestic 1200 pound horse is enough to make you *feel*. The aim is to be aware *now*, and not lost in a past memory or worrying thoughts about the future. Talking about that "*feel*", many of our warriors have been numbed by their experience of war. Numbing is a survivor skill, hardwired after many months of deployment. This skill makes it difficult to reconnect to self, loved ones and community. Horses can help to re-establish that connection.



The program's focus is on resiliency and Post Traumatic Healing. With these two elements in place, PTSD symptom relief is naturally aligned. The program helps to educate, rehabilitate and, most importantly, empower Veterans by supporting them in their journey of healing.

Veterans need to feel connected, mind, body, and spirit. Horses give an energetic infusion that helps reorder souls and "bring them home". Finally, Veterans can begin to know success and comfort in themselves and the community that embraces them.

### Want to know more?

Contact: Nancy DeSantis, Programs Director,  
[info@horsesforheroes.org](mailto:info@horsesforheroes.org)

Website: [www.HorsesForHeroes.org](http://www.HorsesForHeroes.org).

Watch the Horses for Heroes Cowboy Up! Video  
[https://youtu.be/1-uXgrs\\_t1g](https://youtu.be/1-uXgrs_t1g) 📺

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## Your Story Matters (continued from page 6)

These figures suggest that clergy experience a broad array of issues related both combat and to spirituality as it relates to combat. Comfort and confidence in dealing effectively with these issues faced by clergy is a different matter, however. Results from pre-CCTP training surveys (2015) indicated that clergy don't feel prepared to minister to Veterans experiencing grief related to combat, stress related to combat, or moral transgression made during wartime (moral injury). Our findings underscore the importance of the CCTP and other programs to provide training and expertise to clergy who are often on the front line in helping our Veterans.

### Questions to Consider

1. *Aside from the CCTP, what sources of information and training do you have?*
2. *Are there other members of the clergy with interests in Veterans' issues living near to you? If there are, what would it take for you to meet with others to share common knowledge and experiences and learn together?* 📺

## Come to a CCTP Training Event!

The Community Clergy Training Program (CCTP) team is excited to announce that 28 VA Chaplain Facilitators are available to deliver CCTP viewing events throughout the United States, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and Guam. Through a VA Office of Rural Health Enterprise-wide Initiative, CCTP Chaplains, are available to facilitate trainings to educate community clergy about military culture and the wounds of war, providing pastoral care for Veterans and their families, mental health services and referrals, and building community partnerships to help Veterans.



Clergy Training Event in Carrollton, Kentucky

There are several CCTP training events scheduled and we'd love for you to attend. If you are interested in participating in a training in your area, please contact the CCTP VA Chaplain listed.

### APRIL 2017

- 4/13 Northwest Assembly of God, Bentonville, AR, CCTP Chaplain: [Priscilla.Mondt@va.gov](mailto:Priscilla.Mondt@va.gov)
- 4/17 Geneva College, Beaver Falls, PA, CCTP Chaplain: [Paul.Dordal@va.gov](mailto:Paul.Dordal@va.gov)
- 4/18 Nazarene District Office, Overland Park, KS, CCTP Chaplain: [Winda.Lovett@va.gov](mailto:Winda.Lovett@va.gov)
- 4/20 Centerpoint Church, Pagosa Springs, CO, CCTP Chaplain: [Charles.Grimsley@va.gov](mailto:Charles.Grimsley@va.gov)
- 4/20-21 MO State Church of God Assembly Meeting, West Plains, MO, CCTP Chaplain: [William.Hatch@va.gov](mailto:William.Hatch@va.gov)
- 4/21 Seguin DAV House, Seguin, TX, CCTP Chaplain: [Mike.McGruder@va.gov](mailto:Mike.McGruder@va.gov)
- 4/26 Wagoner First United Methodist Church, Wagoner, OK, CCTP Chaplain: [Nancy.McCoy@va.gov](mailto:Nancy.McCoy@va.gov)
- 4/27 Lightle Center, Searcy, AR, CCTP Chaplain: [Priscilla.Mondt@va.gov](mailto:Priscilla.Mondt@va.gov)
- 4/29 Location TBD, Harlingen, TX, CCTP Chaplain: [Mike.McGruder@va.gov](mailto:Mike.McGruder@va.gov)

### MAY 2017

- 5/10-11 Governor's Mansion, Reno, Nevada, CCTP Chaplain: [Johann.Choi@va.gov](mailto:Johann.Choi@va.gov)
- 5/24 Date to be confirmed, Murrysville Alliance Church, Murrysville, PA, CCTP Chaplain: [Paul.Dordal@va.gov](mailto:Paul.Dordal@va.gov)

### JUNE 2017

- 6/1 Moody Methodist Church, Galveston, TX, CCTP Chaplain: [Sherlock.Brown@va.gov](mailto:Sherlock.Brown@va.gov)
- 6/9 Birmingham VA Hospital, Birmingham, AL, CCTP Chaplain: [John.Bailey@va.gov](mailto:John.Bailey@va.gov) or [Jennifer.Dukes2@va.gov](mailto:Jennifer.Dukes2@va.gov)
- 6/12 Arkansas Assemblies of God District Office, Little Rock, AR, CCTP Chaplain: [Priscilla.Mondt@va.gov](mailto:Priscilla.Mondt@va.gov)
- 6/21 Walters United Methodist Church, Walters, OK, CCTP Chaplain: [Nancy.McCoy@va.gov](mailto:Nancy.McCoy@va.gov)
- 6/22 Location TBD, Springfield, MO, CCTP Chaplain: [Priscilla.Mondt@va.gov](mailto:Priscilla.Mondt@va.gov)
- 6/29 Lightle Center, Searcy, AR, CCTP Chaplain: [Priscilla.Mondt@va.gov](mailto:Priscilla.Mondt@va.gov)

### JULY 2017

- TBA East Pointe Community Church, Oklahoma City, OK, CCTP Chaplain: [Nancy.McCoy@va.gov](mailto:Nancy.McCoy@va.gov)
- 7/27 Lightle Center, Searcy, AR, CCTP Chaplain: [Priscilla.Mondt@va.gov](mailto:Priscilla.Mondt@va.gov)

### AUGUST 2017

- 8/12 Wildwood Chapel, Aliquippa, PA, CCTP Chaplain: [Paul.Dordal@va.gov](mailto:Paul.Dordal@va.gov)

For more information about becoming a CCTP Partner visit:  
[www.patientcare.va.gov/chaplain/clergytraining/partners.asp](http://www.patientcare.va.gov/chaplain/clergytraining/partners.asp)



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration

The Community Clergy Training Program (CCTP)  
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[www.patientcare.va.gov/chaplain/clergytraining](http://www.patientcare.va.gov/chaplain/clergytraining)

