



BECOMING A CHAPLAIN IN THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

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Thank you for your interest in becoming a Department of Veterans Affairs Chaplain. VA Chaplains ensure that every Veteran patient has opportunities for free exercise of religion to meet his or her specific needs and desires. Simultaneously, VA Chaplains protect Veterans from having religious beliefs or practices imposed on them from any source while they are in our facilities. Chaplains provide religious, spiritual and pastoral care only at the request of, and with the consent of, each Veteran.

VA Chaplains recognize that spiritual health is a crucial component of overall health for many Veterans. Chaplains perform spiritual assessments and clinical pastoral care that are carefully integrated into the holistic care provided by interdisciplinary treatment teams.

These instructions describe the qualification requirements and application procedures for employment as a VA Chaplain. The staff members listed at the bottom of the page will be happy to answer any questions.

Opportunities to apply for employment as a VA Chaplain are announced on the Federal job website: www.usajobs.gov. VA medical centers may issue announcements that are open only to current VA Chaplains. All job announcements that are open to persons

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who are not already VA Chaplains are issued by the National Chaplain Center. Please see the "Who May Apply" line in the announcement.

If you are interested in working under contract or on a fee-basis at a VA medical center you should contact the Chaplain Service at the medical center. These types of work are not employment. Personnel working under contract or on a fee-basis cannot be converted to permanent employment. Contract and fee-basis Chaplains must meet the same qualification requirements as employed Chaplains.

Individual VA Medical Centers may recruit locally to fill temporary positions. Temporary appointments cannot be converted to permanent appointments.

See also the list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) at the end of this document.

Duties of VA Chaplains

Chaplains work at Veterans Affairs Medical Centers, Outpatient Clinics, and Domiciliaries throughout the United States.

Chaplains at GS-11 provide complete religious ministry to veteran patients in accordance with their needs and desires. They address religious, spiritual, moral, and ethical problems of patients, ministering to newly admitted, pre- and post-operative patients, the critically ill, and the families concerned. Each Chaplain provides pastoral ministry to patients of his/her own faith group, including conscientious attention during emergency and crisis situations. Chaplains assure that all patients have opportunities for free exercise of religion and are protected from proselytizing. Chaplains provide guidance and religious instruction to individuals and groups; arrange for and conduct religious worship services in chapels and at other locations for patients unable to attend regular chapel services. Chaplains maintain cooperative relationships with Medical Center personnel and individuals and groups in the community. This work is carried out in a pluralistic environment; and each Chaplain is sensitive to the religious needs of many separate religious denominations and faith groups.

GS-12 Chaplains provide comprehensive spiritual and pastoral care as needed and desired to patients and their families. This encompasses all aspects of pastoral care including individual and group counseling, leading worship and ordinances, and patient/family education. Chaplains assure that all patients have opportunities for free

exercise of religion. Chaplains locate other Chaplains and/or persons from the community to provide for patients' religious needs as necessary. GS-12 Chaplains collaborate with other health care professionals as members of interdisciplinary teams in assessing patient needs, planning and carrying out patient care; developing relationships with the larger community which support the Medical Center mission; and responding to emergency needs of patients and family members. Chaplains participate in educating health care staff and trainees about the role of Chaplains and the importance of religion and spirituality to many patients in their health and wellness. The work emphasizes a pluralistic team approach to assignments.

Appointment and Pay of VA Chaplains

VA medical centers employ Chaplains in full time, part time, and intermittent positions. Intermittent positions have no prescheduled tour of duty. Chaplain grade levels are determined by locally classified position descriptions and may vary by assignment. Facilities may choose to hire Chaplains into developmental assignments, i.e. appoint the Chaplain at grade GS-11 and promote the Chaplain to grade GS-12 upon demonstrating proficiency and meeting administrative requirements. When hired into such a developmental position, the Chaplain may be promoted without further competition to the higher grade level when fully qualified and recommended by the selecting official; however, promotion is not guaranteed.

Federal Chaplains are appointed in the excepted civil service. Excepted service employees are not eligible to transfer to positions in the competitive civil service. Newly appointed Chaplains serve a one-year trial period.

Federal pay rates vary by locality. The complete list of locality pay schedules can be found at <http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/salaries-wages/> Salaries of part time and intermittent employees are pro-rated according to the number of hours worked. Chaplains are usually hired at the beginning rate ("step 1") of the grade. However, local management has authority to hire individuals above the minimum rate of the grade when justified by a shortage of applicants and/or exceptional qualifications of the person being hired.

Persons appointed to full time and part time positions receive civil service benefits, including generous vacation and sick leave, military leave, Federal employee group life insurance, Federal employee health benefits, and coverage under the Federal employee retirement system. For detailed information about benefits and work life in

the Department of Veterans Affairs visit VA Careers website at <http://www.vacareers.va.gov/salary-benefits/index.asp>

Compensation of contract and fee-basis personnel is determined locally. Fee-basis personnel are covered by Social Security (FICA). Contract and fee-basis personnel receive no other benefits.

Qualification Requirements for VA Chaplaincy

Applicants must meet all the following requirements:

(1) United States Citizenship: Non-U.S. citizens may only be considered for employment as a Chaplain when there are no qualified U.S. citizens available for a position. Additional restrictions apply. Further information is available on-line at: <http://www.opm.gov/employ/html/Citizen.htm>.

(2) Ecclesiastical Endorsement: Must possess ecclesiastical endorsement, dated within the past 12 months, from the designated national endorsing official of his/her faith group or denomination. Ecclesiastical endorsement is the written official statement of the endorsing body certifying that the applicant is in good standing with the faith group or denomination and that the individual is, in the opinion of the endorsing body, qualified to perform the full range of ministry required in the VA pluralistic setting. We can accept endorsements only from the nationally designated official. If you do not know who is the ecclesiastical endorser for your faith group, please check the list on line at <http://www.patientcare.va.gov/Chaplain/index.asp>. Select "Employment Information and Resources" then scroll down to the "List of Ecclesiastical Endorsers." If you do not find your faith group on the list, phone the National VA Chaplain Center at (757) 728-7069. Endorsements must state that the individual is endorsed specifically for the Department of Veterans Affairs. Endorsements for military chaplaincy or for any other organization are not acceptable.

(3) Education: All applicants must possess the degree of Master of Divinity or equivalent educational qualifications. **Equivalent educational qualifications means** possession of a bachelor's degree of at least 120 semester hours **plus** completion of not less than **70** semester hours of graduate course work which included all of the following: **20** semester hours in pastoral ministry; **20** semester hours in any combination of theology, ethics and philosophy of religion; **20** semester hours in the study of sacred

writings, including the study of languages in which sacred writings are/were written; **10** semester hours in religious history and/or world religions.

To meet federal requirements, education must be from college(s), university(ies), or theological institution(s) that are accredited by an accrediting body recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. The U.S. Department of Education has a database of accredited institutions on the internet at: <http://www.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/index.html>

(4) Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE): In addition to the education requirements, applicants must have completed at least **2 units** of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) in program(s) accredited by the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE) or, the National Association of Catholic Chaplains (NACC). Training in other programs will be considered on a case-by-case basis for equivalency. **800** hours of supervised ministry in a formal training program which incorporated both ministry formation and pastoral care skills development is required for equivalency to two units of CPE. *(Note: You will find a directory of all the CPE programs at VA medical centers on our website: www.patientcare.va.gov/Chaplain All CPE programs affiliated with VA medical centers are accredited by the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE). For a directory of all ACPE CPE programs see the website: www.acpe.edu)*

(5) Experience: To qualify for GS-11, you must have at least two years of professional experience, after completion of the M. Div. or equivalent, which has demonstrated both practical pastoral knowledge and skill, and ability to minister in a pluralistic setting. Supervised or guided pastoral experience completed **during** graduate professional education may be credited for up to one of the two years of experience. Part time experience is pro-rated by comparing the average number of hours worked to a 40-hour work week. Completion of a doctoral degree directly related to pastoral ministry may be substituted for one year of experience.

For GS-12, in addition to the requirements for GS-11, at least one additional year of professional experience, equivalent in complexity and responsibility to the GS-11 level, which has demonstrated all of the following:

- (a) Ability to serve as a consultant or expert to an interdisciplinary treatment team;
- (b) In-depth knowledge of related professional fields, particularly in the behavioral sciences;

- (c) Understanding of, and ability to respond to, the particular concerns and issues pertaining to treatment of veterans;
- (d) Knowledge of the structure, regulations, practices, and programs of health care delivery systems;
- (e) Ability to interpret and apply a body of rules, regulations, policies, and procedures in professional practice;
- (f) Ability to develop and maintain liaisons with a variety of outside organizations.

(6) **English Language Competency:** All applicants must be proficient in written and spoken English.

(7) **Selective Service Registration:** By law, all males born after December 31, 1959 must have registered with the selective service system (the draft) or have a valid exemption.

(8) **Specialized Positions:** Positions with specialized clinical assignments, such as mental health or substance abuse, require additional applicable knowledges, skills, and abilities.

How to Apply

All opportunities to apply are listed on the Federal job website: [USAJOBS - The Federal Government's official employment site](#) Please follow the instructions in the announcement for which you wish to be considered. Upload documents or fax them in accordance with the instructions in the announcement. Do not send any documents to the National Chaplain Center.

When you apply you will need all the following documents, plus anything additional specified in the announcement:

- (1) **A resume** There is no Federal or VA application form needed to apply for VA Chaplain positions. When you apply for vacancies in USAJOBS the system will give you the opportunity to complete an on-line resume. We will accept that resume, but you are free to submit a resume in any format you desire. Regardless of the format of your resume, please be sure to include all of the following information: The names and locations of colleges and universities attended, the degree(s) earned and the date(s); the dates and location of clinical pastoral education and other relevant training; and information about all relevant paid and unpaid experience, including: job title, duties and accomplishments,

employer's name and address, starting and ending dates (month and year), **number of hours worked per week**, and the salary (if any). If you do not provide us this information we may not be able to determine if you meet the qualification requirements and you may lose consideration

- (2) **Ecclesiastical endorsement**¹ dated within 12 months prior to the closing date of the announcement for which you are applying.
- (3) **If you are a Veteran:** Submit a copy (the copy labeled "member copy 4") of each of your military discharge forms (DD-214), and, if you are claiming 10-point preference, usually based on a service-connected disability, submit **SF-15** "Claim for 10-point Veterans Preference" with the supporting documents as specified in the instructions on that form. For information on veteran preference see <http://www.fedshirevets.gov/job/vetpref/index.aspx> Please note that the "Special Hiring Authorities for Veterans" mentioned on that page are not applicable to hiring Chaplains in the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- (4) **Transcripts** of all graduate education (copies of official transcripts are acceptable, as are student copies. Grade reports are not acceptable. On-line copies will not be accepted if they do not show the name of the educational institution and the date(s) of all degrees earned)
- (5) **Clinical Pastoral Education Certificates**, or a detailed description of the training you wish to have considered as equivalent.

Students: Persons who have completed a one-year Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) residency or fellowship at a Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, or four consecutive units of CPE in a VA Medical Center, and who meet all VA Chaplain qualification requirements, are eligible for special "non-competitive" consideration for one year after completion of the residency or fellowship. These individuals should request application instructions from their CPE Supervisor or from the National Chaplain Center.

¹ Ecclesiastical endorsements must be signed by the official that the faith group has designated in writing to VA. A list of all endorsing officials is on the VA Chaplain website: www.patientcare.va.gov/Chaplain. Look in the "Employment Information" section. If your faith group has not designated an endorsing official, contact the National Chaplain Center for instructions on how it may do so.

Evaluation of Applicants: The Board of Excepted Service Examiners (“the Board”) comprises Chaplains at the National VA Chaplain Center in Hampton, Virginia. The Board determines eligibility and rates qualified applicants with a score of from 70 to 100. Veterans who are entitled to preference get either 5 or 10 additional points. The Board refers the highest-scoring applicants to the medical center at which the vacancy is located. Officials at the medical center interview the applicants and make selections.

Once your application has been reviewed by the Board, you will receive an email “Notice of Results.” If you did not give an email address in your application you will receive your Notification by regular mail. The Notice will inform you of your eligibility status, tell you your rating (if applicable) and whether your application has been referred to the selecting official. If you are referred and not selected you will be notified by our office.

The Department of Veterans Affairs is an Equal Opportunity Employer. All applicants will be considered without regard to discriminatory factors that are prohibited by law.

For more information about Chaplaincy in the Department of Veterans Affairs, visit our internet web site at: www.patientcare.va.gov/Chaplain

For further information about the Department of Veterans Affairs and VA jobs in general visit: www.vacareers.va.gov

Becoming a VA Chaplain

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

1) Who is my ecclesiastical endorser?

A Each religious faith group that wishes to provide Chaplains to the military and/or VA has designated a specific individual as their national endorser for this purpose. If you do not know who your endorser is, please see the list on line. Open the VA Chaplain website at www.patientcare.va.gov/Chaplain , then select “Employment Information and Resources” from the list on the right, then scroll down to a link to “List of Ecclesiastical Endorsers.”

2) What if my faith group is not on the list of ecclesiastical endorsers?

A If your faith group has not designated an ecclesiastical endorser to the Department of Veterans it may request to do so by submitting VA Form 10-0379 to the National VA Chaplain Center. The form includes instructions about the supporting documents that must accompany it. The form is available on line at www.va.gov/forms. In the blank form number box at that site, type in 10-0379.

3) How do I find out what jobs are open?

A Opportunities to apply are announced online at www.usajobs.gov Enter “Chaplain” as the keyword and leave the location box empty, then click on the search button. Please be sure to submit all the documents required in the announcement.

4) Is there an age limit for applying for a job as a VA Chaplain?

A No. There are no age restrictions on applying for or being hired as a VA Chaplain. There is also no mandatory retirement age for VA Chaplains.

5) If I don't have two units of Clinical Pastoral Education, can I still become a VA Chaplain?

A To become a VA Chaplain, you must have completed two units of Clinical Pastoral Education or the equivalent. At the end of this document is information about CPE equivalency.

6) If I have not completed the required two units of CPE or equivalent training can I be hired with the understanding that I will complete the CPE during my trial period?

A No.

7) If my education is from an unaccredited institution can I still be considered?

- A** Education from an institution that was not accredited, at the time that the education was completed, can be accepted if one of the following is met:
- i) An accredited U.S. graduate institution that offers the Master of Divinity or Doctor of Ministry states in writing that your education is equivalent to their Master of Divinity degree.
 - ii) An accredited U.S. graduate institution states that it would accept some or all of your courses for graduate-level transfer credit; AND the courses accepted meet our requirement for equivalency to the M. Div., i.e. at least 70 graduate semester hours which included all of the following: 20 semester hours of pastoral ministry; 20 semester hours in any combination of theology, ethics, and philosophy of religion; 10 semester hours in religious history or world religions; and 20 semester hours in the study of sacred or religious writings, including the study of languages in which sacred or religious writings are written.
 - iii) *Education completed outside of the United States* should be submitted to a credentials evaluation service for a determination as to its U.S. equivalent. A directory of these organizations is on the website of the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services: www.naces.com

8) What is the “Excepted Service?”

- A** Hiring for federal civil service jobs is designed around competitive, merit-based procedures administered by a federal agency called “The Office of Personnel Management” (OPM). Congress and OPM authorize some “exceptions” to the competitive procedures. These “exceptions” comprise the “excepted service.” The profession of Chaplain, throughout the federal government, is in the excepted service. When hiring into the excepted service each federal agency or department is responsible for setting up and administering appropriate procedures to evaluate applicants.

9) What is the “Board of Excepted Service Examiners?”

- A** This is the official name of the Chaplains at the National VA Chaplain Center who, as subject matter experts, evaluate all applicants for employment as VA Chaplains. The official term for the evaluation process is “examining,” although applicants do not take a test. The Board is comprised of Associate Directors of VA Chaplaincy who are designated by the Director of VA Chaplain Service.

10)How will I know the how I have been rated by the Board?

- A** You will receive a “Notice of Results” by email. If your application is referred to the facility at which the vacancy is located, we will also notify you when a selection has been made to fill a position for which you have applied

Who gets Veterans preference?

- A** The rules governing Veterans preference are complex. For information on veteran preference see <http://www.fedshirevets.gov/job/veterans.aspx>

11)Will VA pay for travel expenses for interviews and relocation?

- A** VA may pay certain relocation expenses and/or incentives when there is a shortage of applicants for a particular position. This decision is made by the medical center at which the position is located. The vacancy announcement will state if these will be offered. If you are interviewed, you may want to ask about this.

12)How do I apply for work under contract or on a fee-basis?

- A** VA medical centers recruit locally when they need Chaplains to supplement the full time and part time employed staff. Call the Chaplain Office at the VA location at which you wish to work and ask whether they are accepting applications for contract and/or fee-basis work. Contract and fee-basis Chaplains must meet the same qualification requirements as employed Chaplains.

13)Should I include letters of reference with my application?

- A** Although not required, recent recommendations from supervisors and/or colleagues may be valuable.

14)If I do not qualify to be a Chaplain, can I apply to be a Chaplain Assistant?

- A** No. VA does not use Chaplain Assistants. Individuals must meet all qualification requirements for Chaplain at the time that they apply.

15) I don't know if I meet all the requirements for employment as a VA Chaplain. Is there some way that I can find out before I spend a lot of time on the application?

- A** Yes. Phone John Batten at the National VA Chaplain Center, at 757-728-7062. He may be able to tell you over the phone, or he may invite you to submit a partial application for review.

16)What is “Non-competitive consideration?”

- A** There are two circumstances in which job applicants are referred to medical centers without numeric rating.
- i) Persons who complete a year-long CPE Residency or Fellowship, or four consecutive units of CPE in a Department of Veterans Affairs facility, can be considered for jobs on a separate list. On this list, applicants do not have a numeric score. They are referred in order of Veteran preference. Persons on this list who are entitled to Veteran preference must be selected ahead of individuals on the list without Veteran preference. This eligibility for non-competitive consideration lasts for one year after the completion of the residency or fellowship.
 - ii) Former VA Chaplains can be considered for re-hire on a separate list from other applicants. Former VA Chaplains with veteran preference can be considered non-competitively at any VA location. Former VA Chaplains who do not have veteran preference only have non-competitive eligibility at the facility at which they last worked.

17)Can I volunteer as a Chaplain at a VA medical center?

- A** Volunteers cannot provide spiritual and pastoral care. All spiritual and pastoral care in VA medical centers is provided by compensated, professional Chaplains. Volunteers may perform supportive tasks such as escorting patients to and from chapel services, and distributing approved literature. Contact the Chief of Chaplains at the medical center at which you would like to volunteer.

Information for Applicants About Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE)

To qualify for VA Chaplaincy, you must have completed 2 units of CPE, or have equivalent training. Units of CPE completed in programs accredited by the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE) or the National Association of Catholic Chaplains meet this requirement. All training completed in program(s) not accredited by the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education or The National Association of Catholic Chaplains will be considered on a case-by-case basis toward “equivalent training” as described below.

Equivalent training is not less than 800 hours of supervised ministry in a health care setting, such as a hospital or nursing home, which incorporated both ministry formation and pastoral care skills development.

To be considered equivalent to CPE, training must include the following components:

1. It must be a formal educational program, with curriculum, theological reflection, and formal evaluation of student functioning components, which includes performing health care ministry.
2. The program must include 400 hours of supervised education, training and ministry for equivalency to one unit of CPE.
3. The educational supervisor(s), preceptor(s), teacher(s), or coach/mentor(s), responsible for the program must be qualified to provide the supervision.
4. The educational model must include an action/reflection component (that may vary from one program to another) that must have included: verbatims, case conferences, didactics, Interpersonal Relationships (IPR) with a peer group, worship seminars, spiritual assessments, theological reflection, and group process.

In describing supervised ministry that you would like to be considered as “equivalent training” please include the following information for each period of training

- The beginning and ending dates of training
- The name and location of the institution(s) in which the supervised ministry was performed
- The name(s) and title(s) of the educational supervisor(s)/instructor(s)
- The total number of hours of performance of ministry in a health care setting,

- The total number of hours of classroom or didactics, and individual meetings with the supervisor/instructor
- The learning objectives, the method(s) of reporting on and evaluation of the practice of ministry, and how feedback from peers and teachers was obtained

Please provide supporting documents along with your narrative description of the training. Examples of supporting documents include: Written evaluation of your performance in the program, showing that you successfully completed the training, signed by the supervisor or an appropriate individual; or a certificate, letter, or other document verifying completion of the training.

If you cannot provide any supporting documents, please tell us why.

Detailed information about CPE, and a directory of program locations is on the web site of the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education at www.acpe.edu. Contact each program directly to find out about when and how to apply.