

Briefing to White House Officials
Presented by the
Military Association of Atheists & Freethinkers
February 26th, 2010

The Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers (MAAF) is here today to request Executive-mandated chain teaching sessions supporting nontheists in the military. A new MAAF study of Defense Manpower Data Agency religious preferences shows that Nontheists and other “Nones” represent nearly one-quarter of the military, or over 500,000 service members. Even self-identified Atheists outnumber Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and Jews. Despite our significant numbers within the military, MAAF members continue to see a religious climate, created by commanders and chaplains, that shows little support and sometimes outright exclusion of nontheists.

As nontheists in the military seek morale and welfare support as well as a supportive community, they come to MAAF rather than to their unit chaplains. They come to MAAF with stories about discriminatory statements and exclusively religious or Christian focus within their units. MAAF operates a Chaplain Outreach program that has received few inquiries from chaplains over a period of years. Of those who have responded, we have had chaplains confide anonymously to us that they are afraid to be openly supportive of nontheists for fear of retribution from their commanders and/or Chaplains Corps leadership.

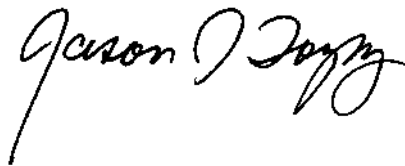
MAAF envisions a military where chaplains are focused on complex and challenging secular duties more than ministry to their own faith group. Joint Publication 1-05 on Religious Affairs lays out a complex array of religious affairs responsibilities a chaplain must attend to, including advisement of the command and support of service members. DoD Directive 1350-2 governs Equal Opportunity and defines religion as, “a personal set or institutionalized system of attitudes, moral or ethical beliefs, and practices that are held with the strength of traditional religious views, characterized by ardor and faith, and generally evidenced through specific religious observances.” While this is entirely compatible with nontheistic ideologies, it is often misinterpreted and explicit action is necessary to ensure no loophole for discrimination exists.

MAAF envisions a military that recognizes that nontheistic ideologies deserve and need the same protection and support as more traditional religions are already provided. MAAF has invited chaplains to publicly commit to the following Minimum Statement of Support:

"Nontheistic service members, including atheists, agnostics, humanists, freethinkers, and those holding other nontheistic designations, serve honorably within our nation's military. I pledge to support nontheistic service members as strongly as I support theistic service members. I further pledge not to use my position to influence individuals or the chain of command to adopt the principles or practices of my own personal religion. I concur that these statements are minimum standards of conduct to which all service members, especially chaplains and commanders, should adhere."

To ensure that all service members, especially commanders and chaplains, understand that nontheistic philosophies deserve the same respect as other traditional religious beliefs, chain-teaching sessions down to the Battalion, Group, or Navy Unit level should be given by chaplains with the explicit support of the unit commander to ensure that there is a consistent message from the chain of command that nontheistic service members are part of the unit and welcome. These teaching sessions will highlight possible areas of conflict and stereotypes that need to be rejected to foster unit cohesion.

Your briefing packet includes information supporting the data we've provided, stories from members providing perspective on our issues, and sample instructional programs for the chain teaching sessions that we request. MAAF and other nontheists in our military community would appreciate any feedback you can give us on the chaplain outreach program and briefing plans.



Jason Torpy
President
Military Association of
Atheists & Freethinkers

Annex A: Demographics – <http://www.maaf.info/demographics.html>

Annex B: Chaplain Outreach program and Minimum Statement of Support -
<http://www.maaf.info/chaplain.html>

Annex C: Chaplain Lesson Plan (chain teach) – <http://www.maaf.info/chaplesson.html>

Annex D: Nontheist Accommodation for Units (chain teach) – <http://www.maaf.info/chainteach.html>

Annex E: MAAF member stories – <http://www.maaf.info/expaif.html>

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Annex A – Demographics**

Military Chaplain Support

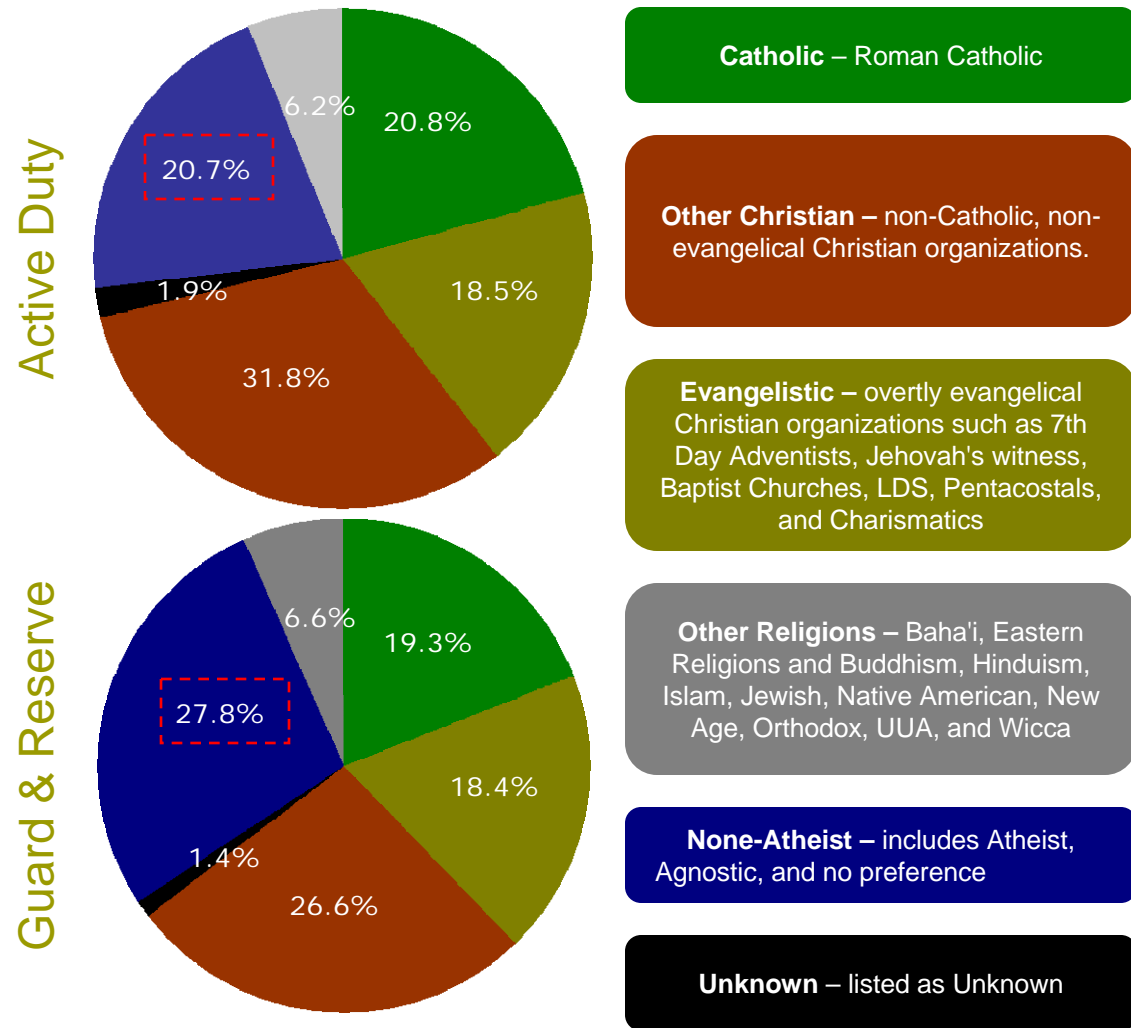
Demographics study of
Defense Manpower Data Agency data



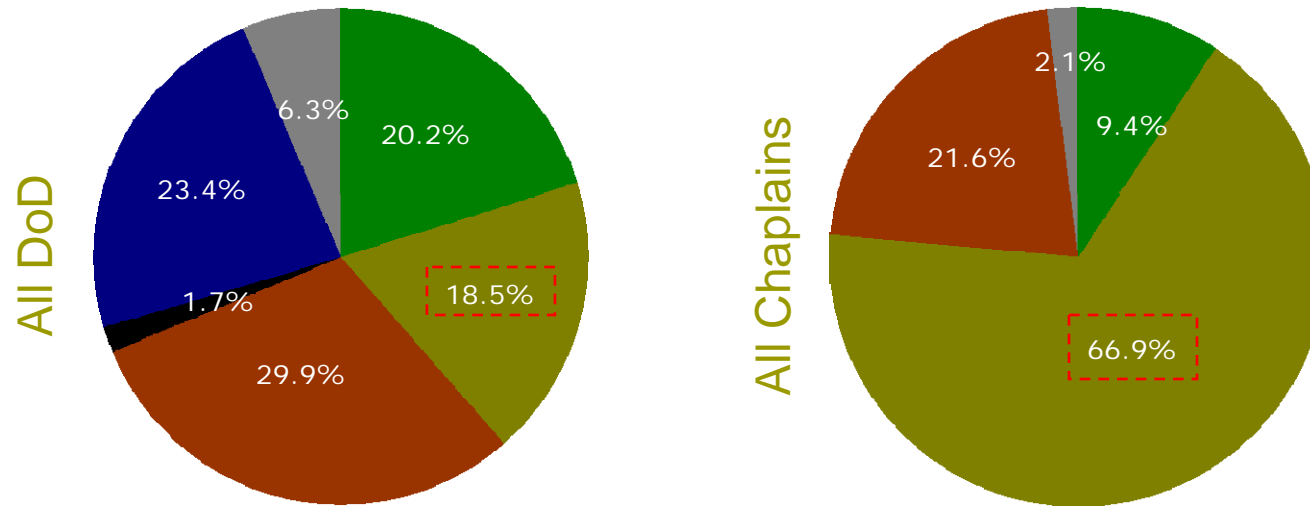
Military Association of
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DoD data show nearly one-quarter of the military is nontheistic

- Nontheists are found throughout the military
- Military and Civilian leadership must recognize and support this significant demographic

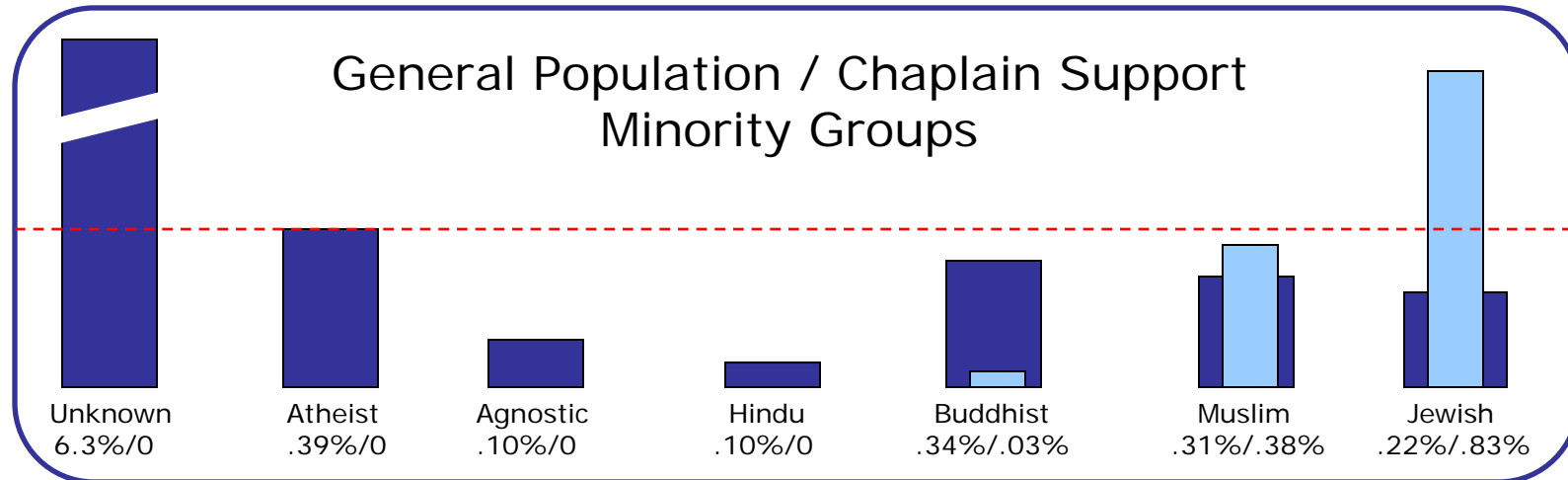


Chaplain staffing reflects evangelical efforts to proselytize the military



- ❑ **Evangelicals** are represented in the chaplain's corps at **over three times** the rate of the general population
- ❑ Protestant (non-Catholic, non-evangelicals) have representation approximately equal to the general population
- ❑ **Catholics** are represented in the chaplains corps at about **half the rate** of the general population
- ❑ Other faith groups are represented at rates approximating the general population in aggregate

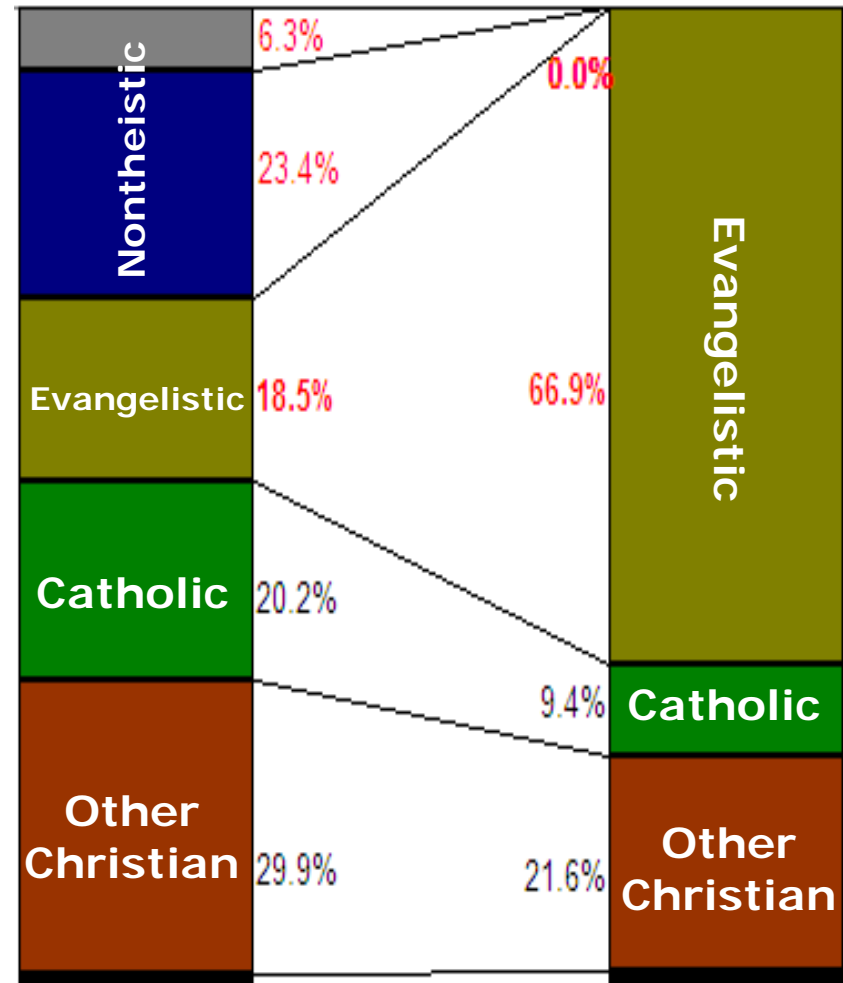
Even professed atheists outnumber many more well-supported religious groups



- ❑ Even **professed atheists outnumber many** more well-supported religious groups
- ❑ **6% of the population are listed as "unknown,"** and this designation may indicate a disinterest in religion or unwillingness to self-identify as a minority.
- ❑ **Nones and atheists**, those professing no specific faith interest or an interest inconsistent with traditional religions, range over **20% of the population with no chaplain support**
- ❑ **Evangelicals flood the chaplains corps** while service members need morale and welfare support that is not constrained by one faith tradition

Demographics show a systematic bias in the Chaplains' Corps

- Evangelicals flood the chaplains corps while service members need morale and welfare support that is not constrained by one faith tradition



MAAF envisions a minimum level of support from all chaplains

- ❑ Until all chaplains commit to support all service members equally and renounce proselytism and evangelism of any sort, we will have a military divided by religion.
- ❑ *Chaplains should pledge, "Nontheistic service members, including atheists, agnostics, humanists, freethinkers, and those holding other nontheistic designations, serve honorably within our nation's military. I pledge to support nontheistic service members as strongly as I support theistic service members. I further pledge not to use my position to influence individuals or the chain of command to adopt the principles or practices of my own personal religion. I concur that these statements are minimum standards of conduct to which all service members, especially chaplains and commanders, should adhere."*

Organizations like MAAF can help to educate chaplains and close the nontheist support gap

❑ Chaplain Outreach

- www.maaaf.info/chaplain.html

❑ Policy Advice

- www.secular.org

❑ Community Connections

- www.maaaf.info/nontheistorgs.html

❑ Advocacy

- www.militaryreligiousfreedom.org

MILITARY ASSOCIATION OF ATHEISTS & FREETHINKERS
WWW.MAAF.INFO
FIGHTING FOR THE FREEDOMS WE DEFEND
PROJECT OF SEE

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Annex B – Chaplain Outreach Program**

Chaplain Outreach

- [MAAF Position on Chaplains](#)
- [Minimum Statement of Support](#): See below for a statement all chaplains should approve.
- [Letters to chaplains and commanders](#): Reach out to your local command and chaplains. [http://maaf.info/dearleader.html]
- [Chaplain Report](#): Chaplains who have made their previously disparaged nontheists in the military.
- [Chaplain Headquarters contact information](#)
- [Secular counseling](#): Find support for or information about the nontheist worldview.
- [Air Force Guidelines](#): Although not perfect, these guidelines illustrate that the support for nontheists is not universal.

MAAF position on chaplains

Chaplains in government service should serve the needs of all service members. They should provide counseling to improve the morale of soldiers and help service members with their personal problems. Chaplains should protect the beliefs of all service members and ensure that there is no actual or perceived discrimination within the command based on service members' beliefs. MAAF also intends for this policy to reconcile chaplains with nontheistic service members or commanders who are intolerant of the faith-based chaplaincy.

In order to do this, chaplains must have sufficient training and experience to provide service to all service members. The ability to run worship services for one faith group is a skill chaplains must focus on one group, but their ability to counsel, foster worship services, and advise the command involves training far beyond what they bring to their military chaplain training from seminary school. This task starts by opening communication between chaplains, MAAF, and the many [nontheist organizations](#) that are ready to support service members.

MAAF supports the acceptance of secular chaplains into military service (in addition to faith chaplains). They would be able to run counseling sessions and morale-building events for all service members without the perception of exclusion of persons not belonging to a specific faith group. This chaplain could just as easily assist in the organization of religious events, just as a Christian chaplain assists the activities of Jewish soldiers, a secular chaplain assist the activities of any soldier.

Whether chaplains become secular or remain solely faith-based, chaplains must become more versatile and tolerant, and the military must ensure its chaplains serve all service members. To support a purely theistic chaplaincy is to support an unconstitutional government priesthood.

Minimum Statement of Support

The following statement is the core of the MAAF Chaplain Outreach Program and is intended to be a minimum affirmation of commitment to equal treatment of all service members as well as respect for religious diversity within the military. Chaplains are invited to sign this statement as a way of

overcoming misconceptions about religious discrimination within the Chaplains Corps. This perception of discrimination relates both to chaplains against nontheist service members as well as extreme chaplains against liberal chaplains. Signing onto the statement can help to overcome both perceptions. Service members can invite Chaplains to sign this statement as a sign of respect to those of all beliefs. MAAF also offers to assist chaplains in reconciling with nontheistic service members or commanders who may be intolerant of chaplains due to religion.

"Nontheistic service members, including atheists, agnostics, humanists, freethinkers, and those holding other nontheistic designations, serve honorably within our nation's military. I pledge to support nontheistic service members as strongly as I support theistic service members. I further pledge not to use my position to influence individuals or the chain of command to adopt the principles or practices of my own personal religion. I concur that these statements are minimum standards of conduct to which all service members, especially chaplains and commanders, should adhere."

Supporting organizations, ecclesiastical endorsing agencies, and individual military chaplains are invited to publicly show support by [contacting MAAF](#). Below are the current signatories:

[American Atheists](#), [American Ethical Union](#), [American Humanist Association](#), [Atheist Alliance International](#), [Center for Atheism](#), [Council for Secular Humanism](#), [Institute for Humanist Studies](#), [Internet Infidels](#), [Secular Coalition for America](#), [Secular Student Alliance](#), [Society for Humanistic Judaism](#)

[Atheists United](#), [Atlanta Freethought Society](#), [Boston Atheists](#), [Freethinkers of Central Arkansas](#), [Heartland Humanists](#), [New Orleans Secular Humanist Association](#), [Orlando Atheists & Freethinkers Meetup](#), [Space Coast Freethought Association](#), [Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of New Bern](#), [Washington Area Secular Humanists](#)

Chaplain Report

There is a common statement, "There are no atheists in foxholes." This statement is not only untrue, it is discriminatory towards atheist service members. Chaplains of all services have perpetuated this prejudice by making statements to the effect that there can be no atheists in wartime. View a [list of chaplains](#) [http://www.maaf.info/rptchap.html]. Chaplains who state that there are no atheists in foxholes are committing an injustice no less than if they had said no Muslim is an American. MAAF is asking that senior chaplains publish an official condemnation of this practice. You may contact chaplains at the locations below. Also consider alternate secular counseling. If you are having issues with your chaplain, [contact MAAF](#) or refer to our [FAQ regarding harassment](#).

Official Chaplain Headquarters

- Air Force: Chief of the Chaplain Service, HQ USAF HC, 112 Luke Avenue, Bolling AFB, DC 20332-9050, 202-767-4577
- Army: Chief of Chaplains DACH-ZA, Department of the Army, 2700 Army Pentagon, Washington, DC 20310-2700, 703-695-1133
- Navy and Marines: Chief of Chaplains N-097, Department of the Navy, # 2 Navy Annex, Room 1056, Washington, DC 20370-0400, 703-614-4043
- Veterans Administration: Director, National Chaplain Center, VAMC (301/110C), Hampton, VA 23667, 757-728-3180
- Civil Air Patrol: Chief, CAP Chaplain Service HQ CAP-USAF/HC 105 South Hansell St. Maxwell AFB, AL 36112-6332, 334-953-6002

Secular counseling

Although the military provides chaplains on a religious basis, there are secular counseling services available. Aside from mental health professionals, there are a number of services MAAF recommends for the needs of nontheist service members.

- [Humanist celebrants](http://www.humanist-society.org/) have not yet provided a military chaplain but may endorse one in the future. [http://www.humanist-society.org/]
- [Harvard Humanist Chaplain](http://www.harvardhumanist.org/). The Harvard Humanist chaplaincy focuses primarily on university chaplains, but has strong understanding and academic resources related to both the nontheistic perspective and general chaplain operations. [http://www.harvardhumanist.org/]
- [UU military ministry](http://clf.uua.org/military/). Although religious in nature, UU congregations have provided solid support to nontheists. [http://clf.uua.org/military/]
- Joe Beck, of the Council for Secular Humanism, provides counseling services for servicemembers who prefer not to work with religious chaplains. MAAF appreciates his work and provides this contact information: (716) 912-7055, joebeck1@mac.com .

Air Force Guidelines

Of the [many regulations](#) related to chaplains and other activities that MAAF has compiled, the Air Force guidelines are a good example. The Air Force has released [Revised Interim Guidelines](#) concerning religion in the Air Force. The Air Force must recognize that chaplains have a responsibility to all service members, that all service members have a right to exclude themselves from sectarian activities, that the Chaplains Corps must be held accountable for establishment violations, and that 'inclusive prayer' isn't. Also read the [original guidelines](#).

-- The guidelines often recognize the equivalence of belief and absence of belief. This is an important step.

-- A troubling change from the previous set of guidelines is the omission of a requirement for chaplains to service all personnel, including those with an absence of belief.

-- The guidelines provide no statement that Air Force personnel are excused from activities that go against their beliefs. The guidelines state an overt protection of chaplains against activities that go against their beliefs. Establishment guidelines exist to protect all citizens and service members.

-- 'Inclusive prayer' isn't and should be excluded from nearly all events. The guidelines leave an unacceptably large opportunity for abuse, stating 'inclusive prayer may be appropriate'.

-- The guidance claims that military chaplains are responsible for advising the command and are trained to avoid abuses. The guidance also claims that chaplain programs are the responsibility of commanders. The personal biases of chaplains and commanders have created problems in the past. This gap in training and responsibility must be attacked and closed in order for advancement to occur.

Lesson Plan Supplement

Accommodation of Religious Practices - Nontheistic Service Members

Reference: Jason Torpy, Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers, www.maaf.info, 2006;

Version: 20060524-b

Current copy found at <http://www.maaf.info/chaplain.html>

Table of Contents

- Administrative Data
- The Chaplain and Nontheistic Service Members
- Nontheistic Perspective
- Serving Nontheistic Service Members
- Nontheistic Organizations
- Insensitive Practices

Administrative Data

Audience: Chaplains

Purpose: To increase the ability of chaplains to provide for the free exercise of nontheistic service members and to more effectively advise the chain of command on matters of religious practice within the command.

Method: Provide information, resources, and anecdotes relating to the community, practices, and perspectives of nontheistic service members.

Assumptions: Chaplains are instructed in other areas on the policies and regulations that require chaplains to support all service members.

Terms: A comprehensive list of terms is not found here because a list of defined terms can imply that there are that nontheists operate on dogmatic beliefs or immutable faith foundations. This misconception should be avoided. That having been said, the term nontheism is something that might be unfamiliar. Nontheist is an umbrella term referring to those who may individually identify as atheists, agnostics, secular americans, humanists, secular humanists, skeptics, ethical culturalists, freethinkers, or something else. Nontheists hold a naturalistic worldview inspired by reason and science and separate from other groups like monotheists, deists, polytheists, pantheists and others. The term "nonreligious" is common in public use, but it is important to realize that some nontheists consider themselves to be religious (ref SHJ, AEU). Some demographic surveys (ARIS, Pew, others) refer to nontheists as "nones." Nontheist is generally a preferred group identifier, but individuals should be asked how they prefer to be identified. The most important thing in these instances is that labels are not as important as understanding, respect, and support to ensure that religion does not create a rift in the unit.

Religion: Notwithstanding the general statement on terms above, we do recognize and support the official military definition of religion (DOD Directive 1350.2), which is inclusive of nontheistic beliefs and reads as follows: "A personal set or institutionalized system of attitudes, moral or ethical beliefs, and practices that are held with the strength of traditional religious views, characterized by ardor and faith, and generally evidenced through specific religious observances."

The Chaplain and Nontheistic Service Members

The chaplain must support all service members. Although traditional language focuses on “religious freedom,” it is important that chaplains support nontheistic soldiers as well who may categorize themselves as religious or nonreligious. Just as chaplains take action to understand faith traditions different than their own; they must understand nontheistic belief systems. Just as chaplains throughout history have had difficulty accepting Catholics, then Jews, then Muslims, then Wiccans, and other minority belief systems, we all must now recognize and account for nontheistic belief systems. We must do this for the same reason we accepted others – in order to support the single Army team concept and, in a broader sense, stay true to our oath to Constitution and its Amendments, which prevent a religious test for public office, promote freedom of expression, and prohibit government entanglement with religion.

As advisers to the command, chaplains serve as the experts in religious accommodation. As commanders rotate in and out of their command positions, they may not have been in a situation that required them to make the difficult mental adjustment to accept other belief systems. It is incumbent upon the chaplains to pass these lessons on to the command for the benefit of all service members.

The Nontheistic Perspective

People often seek answers to ‘higher’ questions of purpose, origins, and community identity. However, people search in different ways and reach different conclusions, many of which are compatible with military service. Traditionally, the question of religion focuses on scriptural bases, methods of worship, and church governance in addition to pious ethics and how to live in accordance with religious law. The fundamental difference is that a religious perspective has dimensions involving punishment and rewards from church hierarchy, an active deity, and/or the afterlife. Nontheistic service members do not seek to reject these influences; they merely see the supernatural as nonexistent and irrelevant to these ‘higher’ questions.

It is important to understand that this isn’t an effort to reject religion; it is set of evidence-based ethics that stand alone. In addition, it is not uncommon that nontheists have a good understanding of more traditional religions. Many have explored other options and found the secular or nontheistic option to provide more satisfying answers.

Although some think that this lack of belief is due to anger or ignorance, it is important to respect the beliefs of nontheistic soldiers without question, just as Christian chaplains are expected to respect the beliefs of Jews, Muslims, and others, and as Jewish and Muslim chaplains are expected to respect Christians. Every person that believes in a certain god disbelieves in many others. Nontheistic service members have simply rejected one more god than monotheists.

There is a myth that ethics can not arise from the nontheistic perspective. This is an absolute falsehood and should be a focus in any education program. Nontheistic people often seek the same things as their religious counterparts: to live a good life and impact others positively. They might simply have other motivations, reasons, and methods to reach these goals. Without the belief in some higher power and the supporting hierarchy of clergy, nontheistic service members have the challenging opportunity to develop their own way of life. In addition, there is no tradition or authority to provide dogma and terms to which nontheistic service members can default. Conversely, nontheistic service members draw from the entire history of philosophy and religion. The entire history of human thought is viewed with equal skepticism^[1] and rules of logic. It is logic and

skeptical inquiry that direct the development of a nontheistic individual's ethics. Lessons from history, figures of authority, and intuition are accepted, but they are all subject to skepticism. Whether or not individual chaplains internalize the validity of the nontheistic viewpoint, chaplains can only be effective if they have an understanding of the nontheistic viewpoint and can both support and advise others in this area.

Supporting Nontheistic Service Members

Nontheistic service members need the same assistance with respect to morale, family, community, stress, all soldiers need. However, faith and prayer are not useful tools for helping these service members. It is important to understand that prayer is not significant to nontheistic service members, and offering prayer might be seen as disrespectful, not helpful. Referencing faith is likely to alienate the chaplain from the service member.

Chaplains are instructed in a wide variety of counseling techniques. Divinity school often involves non-scriptural philosophy from which the chaplain can draw lessons. Chaplains school offers counseling training. Most chaplains are likely to have training in both philosophy and counseling in addition to their religious training. Nontheistic service members will react positively if the chaplain has the ability to explain why a certain behavior is beneficial without resorting to religious basis. Even if the conclusion is the same, the justification must be other than personal revelation, personal religious tradition, or scripture. While these sources are not invalid, presenting them, especially at first, sends a message that the chaplain is unable to counsel from a secular perspective. As chaplains steward religious freedom and unit morale, they can and must make the adjustment to reach out to all service members – including the nontheistic.

Nontheistic Organizations

Chaplains can receive philosophical insight, counseling support, and community referrals from nontheistic organizations. These organizations have different perspectives on the best philosophy. None claim divine backing or absolute authority. The directors of each organization present their philosophy as a consistent, scientific, and rationally-based way of life available given a naturalistic world view. Whether or not individuals associate themselves with an organization, the focus is generally on personal development rather than organizational success. The websites of these organizations have philosophical insights, representatives, activities, and a community.

Nontheistic service members often feel that they have no support and that they are excluded from the military team. Religious service members may feel justified in discriminating against their teammates if they feel their teammates don't have an 'approved religion.' Directing nontheistic service members to these organizations can not only provide service members social support, but can also provide them with lessons and direction in their personal development.

- Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers - maaf.info
- American Humanist Association and International Humanist and Ethical Union[2] - americanhumanist.org
- Center for Inquiry and Council for Secular Humanism[2] - centerforinquiry.net
- American Ethical Union - aeu.org
- Society of Humanistic Judaism - shj.org
- Additional information can be found at - <http://www.maaf.info/nontheistorgs.html>

Insensitive Practices

There are many practices that may be authorized, but that show a lack of respect for nontheistic service members. Chaplains, if not inclined to change policy, should understand and advertise the damaging effects these practices can have on the military team. While chaplains may have been a party to many of these practices in the past and had no objection, the lack of objection was likely a result of fear of retribution rather than a true lack of objection. Some are presented as personal stories, while others are presented as a more general case.

Each insensitive practice is matched with a more accommodating approach. These more accommodating approaches are presented as an effort to appeal to the interests of all involved rather than resorting to litigation or command policy restrictions.

“There are no atheists at the end of static lines”

Army Parachutist training, otherwise known as “Airborne School,” is a rigorous three-week program designed to train soldiers to parachute from planes. Certification is not only prestigious within the military but also important for career progression. Regardless of rank, all trainees are subject to the close control of the trainers, or “Black Hats”, and other administrative officials.

On the eve of the first jump, the company commander, in the presence of the command chaplain, addressed the trainees. Included in his speech was the statement, “there are no atheists at the end of static lines.” As previously stated, this is an untrue and discriminatory statement that offended at least one atheist in the audience. In order to make his objections known and possibly change opinions, the atheist would have had to approach the commander and make it known that there are atheists at the end of static lines and in his audience.

This would have made the trainee subject to additional scrutiny, if not outright harassment. This particular commander may or may not have reacted favorably, but considering the statements made, the command created the perception of bias against nontheists. The chaplain, by his presence and the actions of his command, create a culture of exclusion rather than accommodation.

To avoid this situation, chaplains should avoid discriminatory statements. In addition, chaplains should be sure to advise their commanders in advance to prevent these situations and take action to advise their commanders if commanders make statements that divide their command. This logic applies to all variations of this particular statement, whether related to atheists in foxholes, cockpits, boats, or whatever atheists serve. The responsibility for chaplains to ensure accommodation in command grows when in training environments that eliminate the opportunity for trainees to speak for themselves. (1998 incident)

Chaplain's Time at West Point Cadet Basic Training

There is a commonly-known story where new entrants to the military are given the option to go to church or clean the barracks on Sunday morning. At West Point, there is a period during the first summer where entering freshmen have Cadet Basic Training. During this period, Wednesday evening is reserved for "Chaplain's Time." Chaplain's Time involved the option to go to the Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, or Latter-Day Saints place of worship and partake in cookies and recreation, along with an optional prayer service.

It is clear in this situation, with the several religious options and the optional prayer service that at least some care was given to avoid a discriminatory environment. In addition, the cookies and drinks were donated by religious groups, and so this avoided government financial support, at least for the food. Senior cadets were also admonished not to bother freshmen during this time for any reason. The mission-oriented justification for the event was that it allowed for a release from the stress of training. An additional consideration was that the Protestant event was held in an auditorium, which provided one secular location.

In an extremely stressful environment where every aspect of life was controlled, nontheists found themselves in a formation with others, in front of his leaders. The command ordered all Protestants into the formation for Chaplain's Time, then all Catholics, then all Jews, then all Mormons, and everyone else, left to stand in formation as everyone else marched to enjoy the benefits allowed to their particular faith group, nontheists and those with un-sponsored beliefs were tacitly identified as outsiders and sent back to no benefits in the barracks.

In this case, there are accommodations made to allow for several groups while avoiding any active discrimination against cadets of minority faith groups. However, there still existed a strong incentive, in the form of recreation and food, to participate in the sectarian events. The command, if it did believe in the mission-oriented purpose of providing a release to freshmen, could have provided a non-sectarian event for all cadets. The event as it happened, caused the public segmentation of certain religious groups and those not of those preferred religious groups, and the provision of special treatment to those religious groups. While the events were not overtly exclusive, they were exclusive in spirit. Freshmen not normally affiliated with those religious groups would have been incentivized to accept gifts and religious messages

Chaplains should ensure that general morale-building events are tied to no specific sectarian organization and are open to all service members. Separations to different areas should not involve a requirement to publicly self-identify to any specific religious faith. (estimate. 1990-present)

Basic Training Field Trip

At Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, basic trainees, following orders, went on a field trip 30 miles away to Lebanon, Missouri. The field trip was billed as a one-time morale-building event during which the trainees would be allowed to enjoy themselves with outdoor events. Upon arriving, the event was as billed. However, the event was capped with a fire-and-brimstone evangelical Christian worship service. The sermon included The service ended with a request for all comers, especially soldiers, to come forward and be saved.

The question in this situation involves the command structure, authorizations, funding, and lesson plans. This situation, involving an overt, highly-attractive evangelical event combined with an off-post trip for basic trainees, is an example of when many checks-and-balances fail to stop religious favoritism from occurring. The trainee, while surrounded by a religion he did not enlist to follow, had no recourse to question drill sergeants who clearly must have had the support of many other administration officials including the training Brigade commander to make this event happen.

Continue to follow updates on this issue at the MAAF watch list - <http://www.maaf.info/watchlist.html>. (estimate. 1970-present)

USAREUR Chaplain messages

The USAREUR Chaplains Corps began showing chaplains delivering a 2-minute message. In most cases, these messages stated the chaplains view of the benefits of family, community, honor, service, and other essentially Army values. In other cases, the message promoted faith and/or church attendance in particular. It is in these cases where chaplains promote religion and exclude nontheistic soldiers. Placing religion above nontheistic values degrades nontheistic soldiers and alienates soldiers from the chaplain's corps.

Chaplains should ensure their messages promote Army values, teamwork, family, and personal development. There will invariably be cases where a chaplain feels that faith is a fundamental requirement of personal, family, and team growth. The chaplain must be careful to use his or her position to deliver the message of the Army while delivering his or her own personal feelings only in personal situations. (estimate. 2002-present)

Prayer at meetings, invocations, and benedictions

This issue is the most commonly-identified problem of exclusionary religious climate in the military. Military meetings are not religious in nature. Prayer is extraneous to the purpose of any meeting. In addition, the prayer involved is left to the choice of the commander. This creates an opportunity to use the power of command for the purpose of proselytism. This is an abuse of power to assert personal convictions to the detriment of the military team. Members of the command serve the nation, not a specific religion. Whether or not they are religious, they are forced to perform duties outside the scope of their military duties.

The "vanilla prayer" is often provided as the answer to this problem. The assertion is that all chaplains can pray to the benefit of all. Chaplains have recently presented a significant amount of opposition to this practice because it regulates their own religious expression. Nontheistic service members have always objected to the practice for the reasons listed above. Nontheistic service members are sometimes allowed to opt out of the religious portion of ceremonies. This is a very public exclusion and creates more problems than it solves.

The only solution is to maintain a military purpose to military meetings and ceremonies. Prayers may still be conducted individually and during religious services.

Religious flag folding ceremonies

There is a religious flag folding ceremony often associated with an Air Force Academy chaplain.[3] Sites claim that this is an official-endorsed military ceremony. This is a myth and the Air Force has taken action to present patriotic rather than religious text to eliminate the myth and perception of religious favoritism. (estimate 1950s - 2005)

Identification Tag Religious Preference

ID tags on line 5 require service members to state their religious preference. The intention is to ensure proper burial rites. However, the effect is to put service members in a position to state their religious preferences publicly very early in their career. Some religious service members also have to change this entry when going to certain overseas assignments due to the danger of retribution after capture. Making this entry optional or eliminating it altogether would eliminate the problem. Religious demographics could still be collected without public display.

Proselytism of the "unchurched"

Some branches of the military have in the past allowed for proselytism of the “unchurched.” Proselytism is specifically prohibited in combat zones and arguably not allowed in any position. In this case, the assertion is that proselytism is always acceptable when referring to those who are “unchurched.” The labelling of people as “unchurched” makes the known problems with proselytism even worse. This is especially bad if someone decides that anyone not of their faith orientation is “unchurched”. Atheists, humanists, and other nontheists are particularly susceptible to this type of discrimination. Nontheistic service members are not confused about their beliefs. They have a naturalistic worldview and reason-based ethics that are just as valid as supernatural, scripture-based ethics. This allowance for proselytism of the “unchurched” is an inappropriate loophole sometimes found in chaplain policy, ecclesiastical endorsing agencies, and/or individual interpretations of policy. Chaplains must, by their actions and future policy updates, ensure that all service members are protected from evangelism. (up to 2006)

References

- [1] Skepticism is sometimes thought to be a negative attitude or an unfair weighting towards the rejection of an idea. This is inaccurate. Skepticism is better described as the fair review of ideas without any unfair preference for traditional or favorable conclusions.
- [2] Organizations listed together have connected leadership.
- [3] Air Force Link, 18 August 05 <http://www.af.mil/news/story.asp?storyID=123011364>

**Briefing to White House Officials, Presented by the
Military Association of Atheists & Freethinkers
February 26th, 2010
Annex D – Nontheist Accommodation for Units**

Nontheist Accommodation Template

- ❑ This briefing was developed by the Military Association of Atheists & Freethinkers to foster awareness and support of nontheists throughout the military. This file can be found at <http://www.maaaf.info/chaplain.html> and should be used in conjunction with the Chaplain Lesson Plan, also at that url. This information has been built with the interests of nontheists in mind, and MAAF appreciates feedback.
- ❑ **Presenters:** the Chaplain and unit commander form a team to establish the religious command climate in the unit and are essential to the message.
- ❑ **Audience:** to all service members. This briefing will be necessary at least annually and should be presented at least down to the Battalion, Group, or equivalent Navy unit level.
- ❑ **Purpose:** To improve the religious command climate of the unit both by ability of chaplains to provide for the free exercise of nontheistic service members and to more effectively advise the chain of command on matters of religious practice within the command.
- ❑ **Method:** Provide explicit support of nontheists from the command as well as resources, and anecdotes relating to the community, practices, and perspectives of nontheistic service members.
- ❑ **Assumptions:** The unit has been instructed on other areas of religious accommodation and equal opportunity.

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Nontheist Accommodation

Ensuring an inclusive religious command climate



[Unit Commander]

[Unit Chaplain]

[Date]

Topics

- ▣ Department of Defense Policies
- ▣ Terms
- ▣ Demographics
- ▣ Common myths
- ▣ Supporting organizations
- ▣ Command & chaplain commitment

Defense policy mandates support for all service members

- ❑ "Unlawful discrimination against persons or groups based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin is contrary to good order and discipline and is counterproductive to combat readiness and mission accomplishment."¹
- ❑ Religion is defined as, "A personal set or institutionalized system of attitudes, moral or ethical beliefs, and practices that are held with the strength of traditional religious views, characterized by ardor and faith, and generally evidenced through specific religious observances."¹
- ❑ **The above definition of religion is entirely consistent with nontheistic ideologies and philosophies, thus protecting nontheists with other religious groups.**

¹Source: DoD Instruction 1305-2 Equal Opportunity

Nontheists represent one of many belief systems in the unit

- ❑ Monotheism: a belief in one god
- ❑ Polytheism: a belief in many gods
- ❑ Pantheism: a belief in an all-present, but generally non-personal god
- ❑ Deism: a belief in a previous god that is now not active or non-existent
- ❑ Nontheism: without belief in gods or the supernatural; secular (umbrella term)
- ❑ Atheism: without a belief in gods
- ❑ Agnosticism: literally, without knowledge; colloquially, uncertain of the existence of gods

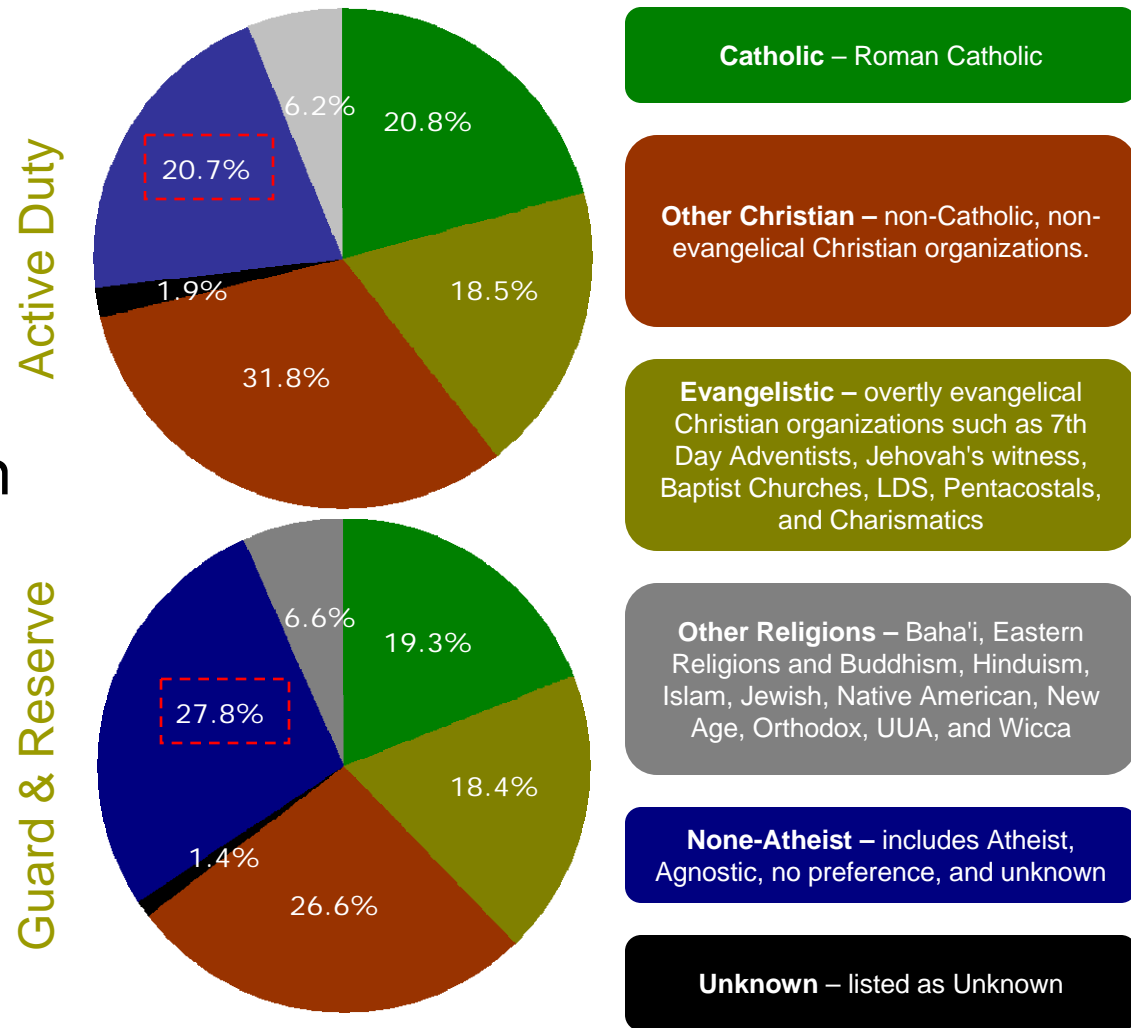
Humanism is a more positive term relating to what many atheists do believe

- "Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity."²
- While other terms are simple definitions relating to belief in the supernatural, the American Humanist Association presents a term relating more to **reason-based ethics and a scientific worldview**.

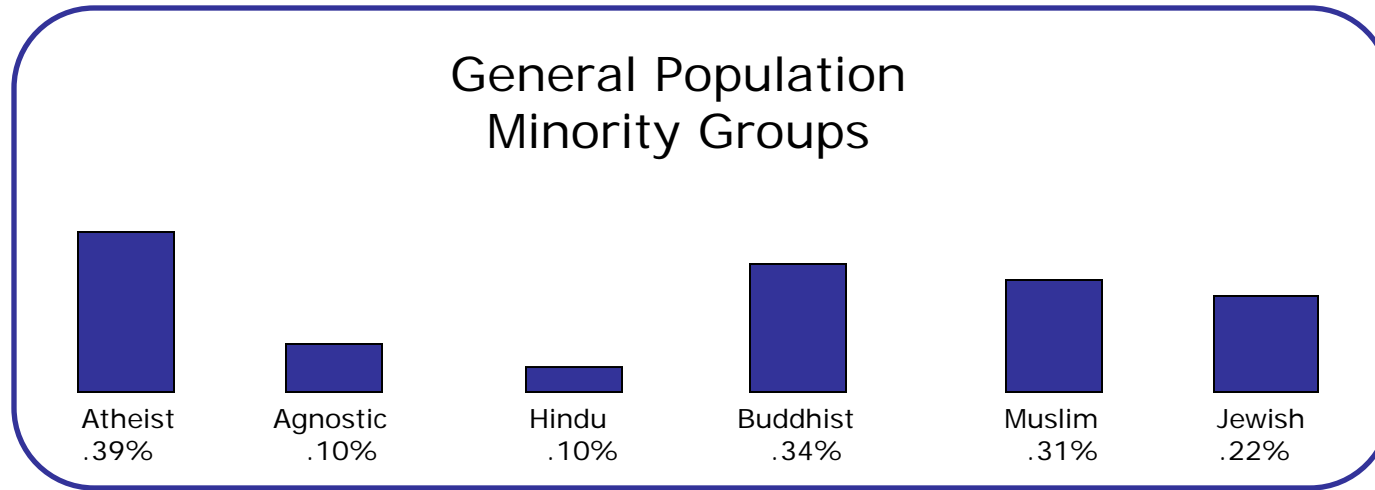
²Source: *Humanist Manifesto III*

DoD data show nearly one-quarter of the military is nontheistic

- Nontheists are found throughout the military
- They serve with us and need the same support



Professed atheists and agnostics constitute population larger than other minority groups



- ▣ Those who identify specifically as Atheists, outnumber those selecting Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim, or Hindu
- ▣ We must respect and support atheists and other nontheists just as we do other faith groups.

Common Myths

- ❑ Myth: Nontheists hate religion
 - Truth: Nontheists may disagree with religion, but that does not prevent study of religion or interaction with religious people. More importantly, hate of a group is an irrational prejudice.

- ❑ Myth: Atheists are amoral
 - Truth: Atheism itself means disbelief in a god or gods, and has nothing specifically to do with morality. However, nontheists generally accept to a science-based world view as well as reason-based ethics centered on humanity and the environment. We are good for each other with no supernatural reward.

Common Myths (cont)

- ❑ Myth: Nontheists worship Darwin

- Truth: Nontheism does not translate to religious terms like worship. There is no object of worship of worship, scripture, hierarchical clergy, or rituals to define itself. Reason and experience help provide understanding.

- ❑ Myth: Nontheists have no hope or comfort

- Truth: Nontheists take comfort in family, natural beauty, and the advancements humanity continues to make. Nontheists are concerned about ugliness in humanity and danger in the universe. Through it all, we greatly value the one life we have.

In addition to chaplains, organizations exist to provide community and support to nontheists

- ❑ General military nontheist support
 - Military Association of Atheists & Freethinkers (maaf.info)
 - Atheist Nexus (atheistnexus.org)
- ❑ Humanist Communities
 - American Humanist Association (americanhumanist.org)
 - Council for Secular Humanism (secularhumanism.org)
 - American Ethical Union (aeu.org)
- ❑ Atheist Communities
 - American Atheists (atheists.org)
 - Atheist Alliance International (atheistalliance.org)
- ❑ Secular Jewish Community
 - Society for Humanistic Judaism (shj.org)

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Nontheism has the same support as other religions and ideologies

- ❑ Nontheists constitute a significant portion of the military
- ❑ The command will not tolerate discrimination against nontheists
- ❑ Chaplains are ready to help connect nontheists to their community and to provide support without proselytism

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Annex E – Personal Stories of MAAF members**

Below are excerpts from a list of nearly 200 profiles of atheists in foxholes at <http://www.maaf.info/expaif.html>. Many others are unwilling to come forward. The statements below provide perspective into service members who feel alienated by the culture of today's military. Service members listed may or may not still be serving on active duty.

There are 4 atheists in my unit and we are having an issue with our chaplain and command praying prior to everything, from meetings to movement. He and everyone else in the command just make us uncomfortable every time we do something. -- Air Force Staff Sergeant Brandon Crilley

Here's what I don't understand: why we need to open official government functions with a prayer. The chaplain sent out "daily inspirations" with bible verses to EVERYONE ... implying that the command had approved (and sanctioned) the religious-overtone communiqués. My first glimpse of Army belief pushing came when I was standing on a parade field as a brand new private, refusing to bow my head for the chaplain's prayer. My platoon sergeant told me afterward that even if I didn't believe in God, I should bow my head out of respect for those around me. I agreed as long he would bow his head with me and pray to some other god he didn't believe in.
-- Air Force Major Tina Kinsley

Religious proselytizing by the "Born Agains" during my time serving as a surgical specialist / medic at Keesler AFB was profound and constant. It became intolerable after an officer I trusted found out I was a Atheist and told others in his christian group on base. At first it was the daily knock at my dorm room to "Save my soul" and then the anger and harassment started, ranging from letters to being denied promotion and extra duty. My commander had no shame or hesitation in telling me that I was not fit to wear the uniform and there were no atheists in foxholes, and Christ was my only hope ... [because of this, I] left the Air Force soon after. -- Air Force Sergeant Russell Case

I can only hope that President Obama re-instates the Separation of church and state, follows the Constitution and returns our nation and our military to their former good standing in the world.
-- Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Theresa Durkee (Syers)

In basic training, a fellow Private "tattled" to our Drill Sergeant that I (oh-my-gosh) didn't believe in God. A lot of embarrassment ensued, and I was given "special" treatment by him for the rest of my training. In leader development training, (and one time) during the entire 1-2 hours that he was with me, he vehemently tried to proselytize me. ... I wish I was armed with the information and resolve that I have today. -- Army Sergeant KJ Kendall

The broadcast of Pro-Christian media on government television overseas, without a single Atheist or even non-christian (religious) broadcast is troublesome. When speaking out about such issues, I am told that this is the way the Military is, and that if I don't like it, I don't have to stay in.
-- Army Sergeant Aaron Couture

As a First Sergeant, from 1996-2004, I was denied one job because the commander found out I was an Atheist. I had an interview set up with the Colonel. He called off the interview the day before. I asked his retiring First Sergeant why he did that. The First Sergeant said he looked at my records and saw I was an Atheist. -- Air Force Senior Master Sergeant Timothy Cathers