



REPLY TO  
ATTENTION OF:

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
2500<sup>TH</sup> MILITARY INTELLIGENCE GROUP  
P.O. BOX 25, BUILDING #938  
JACKSONVILLE NAVAL AIR STATION, FLORIDA 32212-0025

ARRC-MIR-JA

29 SEP 2008

MEMORANDUM FOR INSPECTOR GENERAL Military Intelligence Readiness Command,  
Ft. Belvoir, VA

THRU COMMANDER, 2500<sup>th</sup> Military Intelligence Group, Jacksonville NAS, Jacksonville, FL

SUBJECT: Complaint Regarding MIRC Sponsored Strong Bonds Training

1. PURPOSE. This memorandum is intended as a complaint regarding the MIRC Strong Bonds program and as a request for the IG to investigate the MIRC Strong Bonds program in accordance with AR 20-1. The present MIRC version of Strong Bonds is concerning because it presents Constitutional violations of the separation of church and state and of the religious freedoms of non-Christian soldiers who likely will attend the training. At a recent MIRC Strong Bonds event, Bibles, and other books containing Bible verses and biblical sermons were distributed. Other course materials and videos were very strongly Christian in content. The Chaplain presenters encouraged the class to *"Love your partner like Jesus loved the church."* This was most inappropriate and made me feel highly uncomfortable throughout the training weekend.

2. I, [name and unit redacted], attended the MIRC sponsored Strong Bonds Singles training in Orlando, FL from 29 February 2008 to 2 March 2008. The Det 1 Commander, LTC Ruben Toyos, attended the Strong Bonds Couples training at the same time and location. MIRC Chaplain, LTC Wylie Johnson and 99<sup>th</sup> RSC Chaplain, LTC Kenneth Kirk presented the training. When I signed in at Strong Bonds on Friday evening 29 February, I was handed a Strong Bonds tote bag that contained the following items:

a. A camouflage box, titled, **"Every Soldier's Battle Kit,"** and imprinted with the name, **New Life Ministries**, their phone number, website (<http://www.newlife.com/>), and phrase, "Fighting the battle within." The box contained:

- A Bible, titled, **"The Life Recovery Bible;"** and four volumes by Shannon Ethridge (website <http://www.shannonethridge.com/>);
- **"Every Woman, Every Day,"** (365 Christian readings and sermons about "sexual purity");
- **"Every Woman's Battle,"** (a book of Christian sermons, and Bible verses to "Discover God's plan for sexual and emotional fulfillment.");
- **"Every Woman's Battle Promise Book,"** (a "daily devotional" of Bible verses to support the reader in a quest for "sexual integrity");
- **"Every Woman's Battle Workbook,"** (an exercise book of Bible verses and Bible lessons as a companion to Every Woman's Battle).

b. **"The Five Love Languages,"** by Pastor Gary Chapman (<http://www.garychapman.org/bio.htm>). **"The Five Love Languages"** formed the core of the

Saturday portion of the Strong Bonds training. The theme of Love Languages is that couples have different communication styles and need to learn each other's style to improve their relationship. The theme is sound. However, the book contains references to Jesus and Bible verses. The book's final chapter is "A Personal Word" from Gary Chapman where he discusses finding "Christ" and becoming a "true believer." Chapman encourages the reader to "make your own investigation of the one whom, as He died, prayed for those who killed Him: "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." That is love's ultimate expression."

- During Strong Bonds, videos were shown of Gary Chapman in which he quoted Bible verses and encouraged the audience to "Love your partner like Jesus loved the church." Chaplain Johnson and Chaplain Kirk repeated that same expression multiple times during Strong Bonds. The Love Languages website, <http://www.fivelovelanguages.com/> describes Gary Chapman as "the leading author in **biblical** marriage counseling" and states that Chapman's message is that "to enjoy the marriage you have always wanted, we have to be the person Jesus has always wanted us to be."

c. "The Thrill of the Chaste," by Dawn Eden. The author is described on the back cover as "Jewish-born" and throughout the book as a "former agnostic Jew." The book describes in detail how she led a highly promiscuous and drug abusing lifestyle until she had a "born again experience" and "realized for the first time ... that [Jesus] was truly God's Son." The book is filled (almost every page) with Bible verses and with the author proselytizing Christianity. Chaplain Johnson recommended this book multiple times during the training.

3. On Friday evening, 29 February 2008, I advised Chaplain Kirk of my objections to Bibles and other books of Bible verses and sermons being distributed. Chaplain Kirk stated he was "just a fill-in" and was not aware that Bibles or Christian books had been distributed. After the seminar, Chaplain Kirk emailed me and asked for my feedback about the Strong Bonds training. I responded by outlining my objections to the Christian course materials and other Christian course content. Chaplain Kirk did not respond to my email.

4. Throughout the course Bible verses were frequently quoted, along with the phrase "Love your partner like Jesus loved the church." As a non-Christian, I was very uncomfortable with this. I realize that participation in Strong Bonds is presented as being voluntary. However, the Strong Bonds website indicates that this is a high priority program within the Army that envisions maximum participation to achieve results. The following quotes are from the website <http://www.strongbonds.org/skins/strongbonds/display.aspx> (bolding is mine):

- "The Army – **backed by Congress** - has committed **unprecedented resources** to help Soldiers build stronger relationships through the Strong Bonds Program."

- "More than 30,000 couples have attended over 1,300 events. The program's success has led to **increased funding**, expansion Army-wide, and more training options."

- "Strong Bonds programs are offered by Army Chaplains **with the full support of your Commanding Officer**. You'll gain practical, useful information based on a **nationally recognized curriculum that's been carefully chosen**."

The 2008 Army Posture Statement indicates that Strong Bonds is crucial to readiness:

[http://www.army.mil/aps/08/information\\_papers/sustain/Strong\\_Bonds\\_Program.html](http://www.army.mil/aps/08/information_papers/sustain/Strong_Bonds_Program.html)

On May 29, 2008, an Associated Press article on the high military suicide rate reported, "Since troubled relationships rate as a main trigger for suicides, the chaplain corps is expanding its Strong Bonds program to teach troops and families how to improve relationship-building skills."

5. The Strong Bonds website does not indicate that training sessions are religious denomination specific or even that any religious content is to be expected. Prior to attending the training, I spoke with SFC Mark Wiggins, MIRC Chaplains' Assistant. SFC Wiggins advised that this was not a religious program and that it was suitable for Soldiers of all religious beliefs to attend. However, SFC Wiggins also added, "*It is possible that the Chaplain may talk about Jesus during the training because that is what we believe.*"

6. The MIRC version of Strong Bonds is concerning because it involves Constitutional violations of the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment which prohibits the Government from endorsing a particular religious belief and requires separation of church and state. Non-Christian Soldiers' religious freedoms are being violated by the manner in which the MIRC has chosen to conduct its Strong Bonds program. MIRC Soldiers are faced with the choice of foregoing a significant training and travel benefit or enduring Christian proselytizing in order to receive those benefits. The training was scheduled in Orlando, a premier travel destination, with lodging at a luxury hotel, with much free time provided, in order to entice maximum participation. I have just received an email notice of upcoming MIRC Strong Bonds events scheduled for Myrtle Beach, SC and again for Orlando, FL. I have also received notice of 99<sup>th</sup> RRC Strong Bonds events scheduled in Niagra Falls, Hyannis, Colonial Williamsburg, Boston, Lake George NY, Stowe VT, among other attractive locations.

7. My recommendation would be for the IG to conduct an investigation of the MIRC Strong Bonds program in accordance with the requirements of AR 20-1. At minimum, the MIRC needs to improve the program by developing a secular, non-religious, Strong Bonds training program. If the MIRC Chaplain is unwilling to provide a purely secular Strong Bonds training, my recommendation would be for the MIRC to obtain civilian non-religiously affiliated contractors who could provide a secular relationship improvement training program completely separate from any Chaplain involvement. Since it appears that Strong Bonds is going to continue to be a high priority program, it should not be permitted to be transformed into a vehicle for Chaplains to proselytize their own Christian religious beliefs. In the same regard, Chaplains of other faiths who are Strong Bonds presenters should not be using and distributing course materials that are specific to their faiths.

8. The point of contact for this memorandum is [name and contact information redacted].

[name, rank, and unit redacted]