

RESOURCE FOR VETERANS DAY AND BEYOND

# RETHINKCHURCH®



## WELCOME HOME

### A Veterans Day Worship Packet

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*Ideas to Enhance Your Worship Experience*



Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors.  
The people of The United Methodist Church™

RETHINKCHURCH®

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# INTRODUCTION

As the body of Christ, caring for others is our responsibility. The military and their families are often overlooked in a time when so many of them are in transition.

While many of us at home may not understand the traumas of war, we can still show support to their families while they are away. We understand the need to demonstrate hospitality when they return. Whether they served in wars past and live on with those memories, or whether the mental, physical or spiritual wounds are still fresh, the church has the opportunity to help them heal.

We can welcome them home. We can say, “You have a family.”

This packet contains communications resources for planning Veterans Day and other military ministries. Included in the packet is a postcard to invite the community, a worship service to build upon, ideas to enhance a worship experience, questions for small group discussions and tips for local church participation. These items are customizable, and you can adapt each to fit the needs in your community for military ministries all year long.

# THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH PERSPECTIVE

To explore The United Methodist Church's position on the support of our Armed Forces and veterans, please see the following guidance from *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church*.

## Prayer and Support for Members of the Armed Forces and Veterans

WHEREAS, our Social Principles state that war is incompatible with the teachings and example of Christ (165.C); and

WHEREAS, the pervasiveness of violence and the threat of violence in social ordering on the local, national, and international levels present conscientious Christians with profound challenges in living out the Church's rejection of war and violence; and

WHEREAS, reflecting these challenges, our Social Principles state that we support and extend the ministry of the Church to those persons who conscientiously oppose all war, or any particular war, and who therefore refuse to serve in the armed forces or to cooperate with systems of military conscription, and that we also support and extend the Church's ministry to those persons who conscientiously choose to serve in the armed forces or to accept alternative service (164.I); and

WHEREAS, United Methodist men and women have served in various capacities in the armed forces and need the acceptance and pastoral ministry of the Church, regardless of the Church's view of the wisdom or moral justification of the military operations into which national political leadership sent them; and

WHEREAS, the hardships and risks faced by members of the armed forces and the separations inherent in military service impact their families and especially their children; and

WHEREAS, many of those who serve in the military return with physical or emotional injuries, some of which may persist throughout life or first become apparent many years after their return from service; and

WHEREAS, expenditures for medical and readjustment services and the needs of military families should be recognized as a cost of war and an obligation of society as a whole; and

WHEREAS, many military veterans return with experiences that could be an asset in the ministries of the Church, for example, insights arising from the direct experience of military life and war, the perspective gained from having faced one's own mortality, and an understanding of disciplined commitment to a team of people who depend on one another;

Therefore, be it resolved, that the 2008 General Conference of The United Methodist Church honors, supports, and upholds in our prayers those men and women who serve in our armed services and, in addition, honors and supports those United Methodist clergy who serve as chaplains; and

Be it further resolved, that the Church commits itself to extend its pastoral ministry to members of the armed forces and their families during their time of service and after their return; and

Be it further resolved, that we call upon national governments to fully provide medical care and other benefits that promote the welfare of military veterans and their reintegration into civilian society; and

Be it further resolved, that we call upon our churches to extend a welcome home to persons who return from service in the armed forces, to respect their stories and interpretations of their experiences, and to value and encourage expression of their potential contributions to the ministry of our churches; and

Be it further resolved, that we call upon our churches and members to pray for persons serving in the armed forces and their families, to pray for persons whom circumstances have caused us to relate to as enemies, to pray for other persons for whom war has caused suffering, and to pray for peace.

ADOPTED 2008  
Resolution #5061, 2008 Book of Resolutions  
Resolution #268, 2004 Book of Resolutions  
Resolution #251, 2000 Book of Resolutions

See Social Principles, ¶ 164I.

From The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church – 2012. Copyright © 2012 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission.

# ORDER OF WORSHIP

## You Have A Family

(insert date here)

\*The people stand as able

### CALL TO WORSHIP

- ★ **Opening Hymn** **No. 4285** *For the Healing of the Nations*
- ★ **Affirmation of Faith**
- ★ **Prayers of the People**
  - Passing the Peace**
  - Special Recognition**
- ★ **Responsive Reading**

**Leader:** For all who have served in the armed forces to ensure our freedom,

*People: We honor you.*

**Leader:** For the families who kept the home fires burning and provided continuous support for their soldier(s),

*People: We thank you.*

**Leader:** For the wounds you have suffered at the hands of war

*People: For the times of loneliness you have felt on the battlefields of life*

**Leader:** For the sacrifices you have made

*People: For the times you were not thanked*

**Leader:** For the times you chose courage in the face of fear

*People: For the times you were not shown compassion*

**Leader:** For the difficult decisions you had to make

*People: For the losses you have suffered*

**Leader:** We thank you now

*People: We honor you now*

**ALL: YOUR SACRIFICE WILL NOT BE FORGOTTEN!**



# IDEAS FOR WORSHIP

## IDEAS TO GET STARTED:

- Videotape veterans and soldiers saying their name, branch of military, length of service and where they have served. Intersperse with photos of fallen soldiers and their service information.
- Introduce the new outreach ministry for military personnel.
- Set up a prayer station for the military and the congregation before the service, i.e. prayer for healing, prayer for forgiveness, prayer for reconciliation, prayer for peace.
- Hang red, white and blue swags on the first 5-6 pews for military to sit to be recognized. Ask them to wear their uniform, if possible. Hang red, white and blue wreaths or yellow ribbons with a soldier's name lining the sidewalk or attached on the walls of the church honoring all members who have served.
- Host a special food or clothing drive to benefit veterans, military and families on the day of worship.
- Consider using posts for Veterans Day on social media (see below for examples).

## SOCIAL MEDIA POST EXAMPLES:

### Facebook

- Veterans Day. A day of honor, respect, support and service for those who have served our country through the armed forces and their families. What should service look like? Join us for [insert event details] on [insert event date] to honor those who served.
- Veterans day is just around the corner! Come to [insert event location] on [insert event date] to help us serve those who have served us.
- Wondering what you can do to help honor local veterans this year? Come out to [insert location] on [insert event date] to [insert event details] in honor of our nation's heroes. We will see you there!

### Twitter

- Tweet: In 140 characters, what is your prayer for veterans?  
Retweet the responses or use the answers to scroll through during worship or in the narthex of your church.
- Tweet quotations from veterans in your congregation.
- As with the Facebook posts above, use Twitter to invite your community of online followers to any special services planned.

## AN IDEA FOR PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:

*Heavenly Father,  
Who promised to never leave your children's side,  
we give thanks to You for the soldiers who  
have made it home safely and we are grateful for those  
You have ushered into Heaven straight from the battlefields.*

*Bless our soldiers, and hold them safely in the palm of Your hand.  
Bless our soldiers' families and friends;  
help them to always be a source of joy and strength for our military.  
We ask for healing, Lord. Of wounds we can and cannot see,  
Of memories that may never be resolved.  
And of the spiritual relationship with You that sometimes feels so broken.*

*Let Your grace pour down upon those who have served in the battlefield,  
who often return to a continuous battle of transition to civilian life.  
Lift up those who are feeling lost, those who are feeling unappreciated,  
And those who cannot accept the magnitude of their sacrifice.*

*Guide us, as Your Church, to minister to the sons and daughters of war,  
not just on special occasions, but every day, seeking new ways to  
support them in gratitude for their ultimate sacrifice.  
May we become soldiers of relief for them, responding with patience and  
understanding, and providing assistance where it is needed.*

*Help us to become good listeners, a safe haven for our soldiers to speak of their experiences,  
regardless of the horror they may have seen. For in speaking, begins healing.  
Refresh us, Lord. Fill us with Your Holy Spirit so that Your love  
may overflow in all of us, bringing peace and joy and wholeness to us and to those  
who have served and to those who continue to serve our blessed nation.*

*We thank them for their sacrifice. And we thank You for the ultimate sacrifice in Your Son, Our  
Lord Jesus Christ, Who taught us to pray, [The Lord's Prayer]*

## IDEAS FOR SPECIAL RECOGNITION:

- Recognize retired and active military.
- Skype with a soldier on duty and have prayer with them.
- Play video *Battle Buddies*:  
<http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/umtv-battle-buddies-mentor-veterans>  
 or *Wounded Warrior*:  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=off1qhsGuyk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=off1qhsGuyk)
- Play prepared video of active and retired military. Do not forget to include visiting military.

## IDEAS FOR THE CHILDREN'S SERMON:

- If possible, have a soldier in uniform give the children's sermon. Have them ask if any of the children know a soldier and explain to them how important their prayers and cards are to the soldiers.
- Read poems written by children.

## IDEAS FOR THE OFFERING OF OUR GIFTS AND TITHES:

- Have commitment cards for congregation listing ways individuals can serve veterans.  
**Examples:**
  - workday at a veterans home
  - transitional assistance
  - donating food to a local pantry
  - financial counseling
  - donating clothes to the DAV
  - sending cards and letters to military
- For a special offering, have a soldier's helmet on the altar turned up so that donations can be placed inside the helmet.
- All donations given at the altar time of prayer would go to veterans or veteran services.

## IDEAS FOR AFTER THE SERVICE:

- Form a receiving line of our military as people are leaving the service.
- Serve a Veterans Day lunch after church honoring the military and their families.
- Update Facebook and Twitter with thank yous, service details and pictures.

# SERMON STARTER

authored by

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Chaplain Karen Meeker grew up in Huntington Mills, Pennsylvania. Chaplain Meeker is endorsed by the United Methodist Church and is an elder in the Susquehanna Conference. She served a year in the West Indies and three years in State College, Pennsylvania, with the United Methodist Church. She entered active duty as an Army Chaplain in 1997.

Chaplain Meeker is a graduate of Bucknell University and holds a bachelor of arts degree in classics. She received her masters of divinity from Harvard Divinity School. She received clinical pastoral education at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston.

**MISSION:** In worship during Veterans Day Weekend, seek healing and reconciliation for the veterans and their families in your congregation and community.

### Primary text: Judges 11

Jephthah is the bastard son of Gilead. His dad was a respected leader, victorious in battle, who saved the people from the enemy. While his dad was famous, his mom was a prostitute. Jephthah's half brothers did not want to share any attention or inheritance, and they drove him out of the house. Jephthah was an outcast from the start, having to fend for himself. Until one day, a rival tribe was once again threatening the peace of the Hebrews. The elders, presumably his brothers, sent for Jephthah to lead them against their enemy. Jephthah grew up as a fighter. Always being picked on because of his illegitimacy, he developed into a fierce opponent. No doubt they wanted Jephthah to channel his anger at their enemy. A bit reluctant at first and understandably so, Jephthah agrees to return to lead the army in battle. Like his father, Jephthah defeats the enemy. The end.

I love happy endings. Unfortunately, like many veterans stories, it's not so neat. Before he goes into battle, Jephthah makes a vow to God that if God would deliver him, he would sacrifice whoever was the first to greet him at home. His only child was the one who ran out to greet him, banging a tambourine and dancing. His daughter's happiness is only equaled by his grief.

An excruciating story that often befuddles preachers may resonate with our veterans. Coming home is complicated with a host of emotions. People change over time. How much more so with combat as the change agent? Don't let those YouTube reunions fool you. While there is intense joy and relief when a service member is reunited with loved ones, there is also anxiety over the arduous task of fitting back into the family and daily routine.

When Jephthah's daughter learns of her father's disappointment, she does not spend her last days with her dad. Rather, she goes off with her girlfriends. There are split loyalties between service members and their loved ones which creates estrangement.

Recall Uriah, who in Second Samuel chapter 11, King David ordered back from the battle to the city of Jerusalem. David wanted Uriah to cover up his adulterous affair. Uriah, however, does not go home to his wife. He stays in the city gate out of loyalty to his soldiers still in the field. He will not allow himself the comfort of his wife while his troops are still fighting. I wonder how that made her feel? Uriah chose his soldiers over her. Spouses and children make sacrifices themselves for the cause of freedom. Loyalty to the mission runs deep for service members, which competes with their loyalty and responsibility to their families, causing hurt feelings.

So the stories of Jephthah and Uriah unravel in the lives of our veterans. What is the message for them and for the church?

Whenever Jesus interacts with a soldier, He does not condemn. He applauds the faith of the Centurion and He forgives the troops who nail Him to the cross.

*Jesus says, "Blessed are the Peacemakers for they shall be called children of God." Mt 5.9*

Jesus speaks a word of acceptance to those who sacrifice their lives and their families for the cause of peace. Jesus recognizes that the service member follows orders so that there will be order. In following orders, the soldier is estranged from his or her family. Jesus says to the veteran, you are a child of the Father. You have a family, and that family is God's family.

## SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Use the questions below to begin conversations that could lead to a military ministry in your church.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Use these questions in adult Sunday School classes or small groups in the weeks leading up to Veterans Day.

1. The Apostle Paul uses the soldier as an example of self-discipline. Is there a veteran in your congregation that can give some insight into the life of a soldier, sailor, airman or marine?

**Beginning here should give insight as to what ministries would be supportive.**

2. Discuss how to balance loyalty to God, family, and country. How can the church help?

**Consider the Cokesbury resource titled, *Welcome them Home, Help Them Heal*.**

<http://www.cokesbury.com/forms/ProductDetail.aspx?pid=838590&rank=1&txtSearchQuery=welcome+them+home>

3. Physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual wounds have immediate and lasting financial, medical, personal and professional impact on veterans and their families. Some of the spiritual symptoms of combat trauma may include:

- Feeling abandoned by God
- Finding it hard to pray
- Doubts about core beliefs
- No yearning for righteousness
- Anger towards God
- No spirit of thankfulness
- Feelings of alienation from the church, Christian friends
- Loss of Faith and Hope

Where can the church provide support?

**Familiarize yourself with the reasons military personnel may have disconnected from the church.**

4. Can you introduce a young veteran that you know in your community to an older veteran in your congregation? Veterans of various foreign wars may share a bond, a commonality that spans generations. Sharing their stories with a fellow veteran can be greatly cathartic.

Use UMTV *Battle Buddies* video for illustration. Find the video at the link below.

<http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/umtv-battle-buddies-mentor-veterans>

5. Just as we depend on the fellowship of our congregation, a deployed soldier needs the same support. How can you support a soldier while he or she is deployed? How can you support local military families while their loved ones are away?

After reading the discussion questions, list other areas where your church can provide support:

- Financial counseling
- Job placement
- Finding a home
- Providing temporary shelter, food and clothing
- Providing health services
- Other

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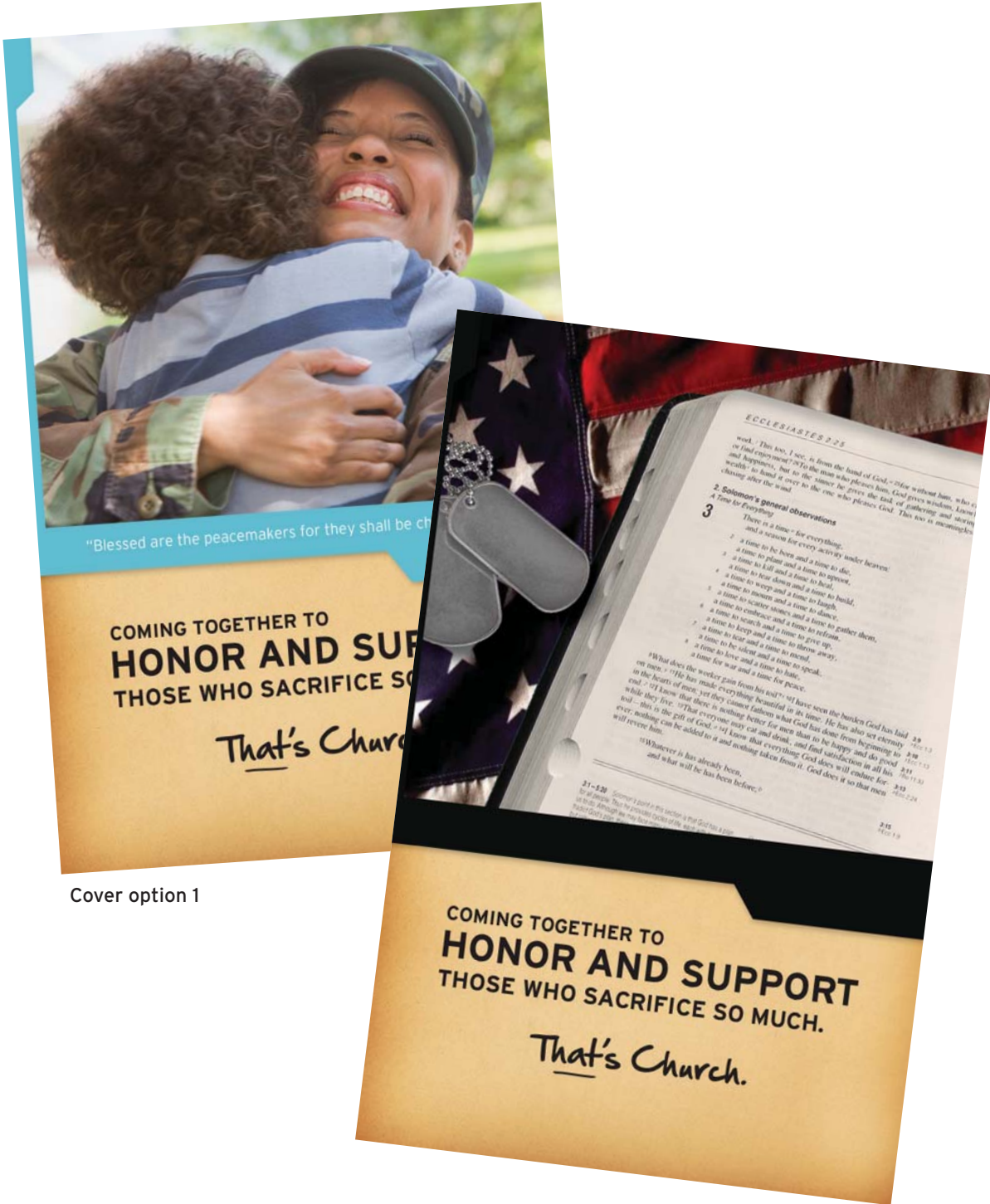
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Cover option 2

# WORSHIP GRAPHICS



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## FLYER



## 20 ways to reach out on Veterans Day

*Veterans Day is just around the corner.  
The observance began almost a century ago.*

In the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918, the Allied nations and Germany declared an armistice—a temporary cessation of hostilities—in World War I. Commemorated as Armistice Day the next year, Nov. 11 became a legal federal holiday in the United States in 1938. After World War II and the Korean War, Armistice Day became Veterans Day, a holiday dedicated to U.S. veterans of all wars.

Now is the perfect time for congregations to engage in ministry with active troops and the families left behind. Here are 20 ideas.

### Reach out to soldiers

Bless deploying troops, praying for safety and for peace. Include deployed soldiers on the weekly prayer list. At Christ United Methodist Church, Franklin, Tenn., the list includes friends and relatives of church members and constituents as well as those with a formal relationship with the church.

- Send birthday cards and personal letters of encouragement. Angie Doerlich founded "Hugs for Soldiers" in 2003 as a ministry of First United Methodist Church, Duluth, Ga. The program has grown from encouraging 31 soldiers deployed from Fort Benning, Ga., to more than 1,000 service men and women. Families, individuals, schools and church groups "adopt" troops to receive supportive mail during their tour of duty. Hugs for Soldiers also assists military spouses and children in Duluth through Thanksgiving and Christmas food drives.
- Invite children to write thank-you notes and draw pictures for troops, especially at special times such as Veterans Day. This is a good class project.
- Assemble and send care packages. Lists of suggested contents can be found online. When the spouse of a newly deployed soldier began attending Glendale United Methodist Church, Nashville, Tenn., members sent care packages and letters to him throughout his deployment. They assured the young man that members were caring for his wife and daughter back home.
- Do something special for troops during the holidays. One idea is to sew Christmas stockings from camouflage-print fabric, fill them with goodies and mail them to soldiers.
- Make lap robes for injured troops using instructions from eHow.com.
- Send a Cup of Joe for a Joe. Since 2009, the Green Beans Coffee Company has delivered a cup of coffee and a personal note to troops serving far from home. The company has cafes on military bases in Afghanistan, Djibouti, Iraq, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Qatar, Southwest Asia and United Arab Emirates.
- Start a military support group like Liz Whitley did at First United Methodist Church, Oviedo, Fla. "It's put me in contact with thousands of soldiers and their stories," she told a Seminole Voice reporter. "They remind us why we're here and the importance of what we're doing."
- Go to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs website for planning ideas and images.
- Study and discuss on military service extend the minister conscientiously of who therefore refuse cooperate with system support and extend who conscientious to accept alternative neither the way of always righteous be Par. 164 I).

11/5/2012 – A UMNIS report by Barbara Dunlap-Berg and Kathy L. Gilbert\*



### Reach out to families

United Methodist Chaplain Laura Bender, who serves at the United States Marine Corps Wounded Warriors Regiment in Quantico, Va., offered suggestions for starting a conversation or beginning a local church program.

- Identify the military families in your community. Are there any wounded veterans? Offer their families assistance with yard work, errands, child care, respite care and transportation to appointments.
- Start a "veterans only" fellowship. Reservists and veterans, especially in areas remote from military bases, often find it difficult to find others with whom to speak about their military experiences. Those who have experienced combat are especially in need of fellowship with other combat vets. Begin with the veterans of any war who are in your congregation. Ask them to do a community-service effort, a building project, an athletic event or a meal together. Include only veterans. Leave them alone. Let them talk. If a few are motivated enough to invite other veterans and plan other activities, you'll have an ongoing program. Even if they meet only a few times, you've given them the opportunity to identify those with whom they can confide.
- Holidays can be especially difficult for military families who move often and usually live far from extended family. Invite them to share an activity or meal with your family. Give them good community info like where to get the freshest real Christmas tree or the best deal on decorations; what parades, concerts and festivals are held annually; and directions to the sunrise service. Ask what additional support they need through the holidays while their loved one is deployed. If they are reluctant to seek help, do something nice to surprise them and don't wait for a response.
- Invite military family members to participate in community-outreach projects with other members of the congregation.
- Evaluate how welcoming your church is to newcomers. Military families often live in a community for a short time, rarely more than three years and often much less. Must a person sing with the choir for years before being offered a solo? Do children of long-term civilian families always get the leads in the church play? Are project chairs only selected from long-term members? If the answer to any of those questions is "yes," military families could spend a lifetime being on the outside and never having a significant role in any of the churches they attend. Remember to allow even your short-term members an opportunity to use their God-given talents.
- Advocate for the needs of veterans within your community and at regional and national levels.
- Use your influence to educate potential employers about the benefits of hiring veterans. If you are an employer, hire a vet.
- Offer to mentor and apprentice veterans in the acquisition of new skills so they can be better prepared to transition to civilian employment.
- Transcend your position on war and find ways to care for military members and their families despite your politics or faith stance.

*Always, pray for military members and their extended families. Support troops and their loved ones in a variety of ways by getting involved in a community project that includes military families or just spend some time with people from diverse viewpoints to talk about your corner of the world and how to expand it.*

The United Methodist Church has many chaplains providing spiritual care for military service personnel and their families. Based upon their input, the United Methodist Endorsing Agency, Board of Higher Education and Ministry, has put together a list of ideas that empower congregational care for deployed and returning service members and their families ([www.ghem.org](http://www.ghem.org)).

Veterans Day is a perfect time for congregations to integrate some of these ideas as we remember and care.

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