



# 70th General Synod of the Bible Presbyterian Church **RESOLUTION**

Grand Island, New York • August 3-8, 2006

Resolution 70:9

## **Praying in Christ's Name in the Military Chaplaincy**

**P**rayer is the offering up of our desires unto God. It is the humble recognition of our utter dependence upon our Maker to sustain our very lives and to order our steps.

For Christians, prayer is made only through the mediation of the divine Savior, Jesus Christ. Because of our innate sinfulness before God's holiness, Christians recognize that we have no claim on God's mercies except as He has revealed those mercies and sealed them to us in His eternal Son. Therefore it is necessary and proper for praying Christians to acknowledge that God's gifts are granted to us, not out of any personal merit on our part, but for Christ's sake.

Christian chaplains have a long history of ministry within all branches of the U.S. military. With that history is a long-standing tradition of praying in public, often at the request of unit commanders. These prayers have been offered in times of emergency and in combat, as well as at routinely scheduled military ceremonies. Until recent years, Christian chaplains were free in conscience to follow the pattern of prayer taught in the New Testament of praying in the name of Christ. This practice was done by a representative accountable to one's own faith group within a military context. At the same time, "it has been the prerogative of the military to determine suitability of attitude and physical ability to endure the expected service hardships and to function competently within the military culture, but never to dictate to a chaplain, the THEOLOGICAL CONTENT of his beliefs, or to constrain his conscience in the PASTORAL APPLICATION of those beliefs."<sup>1</sup>

The Bible Presbyterian Church recognizes the importance of ministry among military service personnel. Our denomination opposes efforts to blend all public expressions of religion within the military into one generic, civil religion. Rather, if there ever were an occasion to allow the practice of religious diversity within a pluralistic context, it would be the free exercise of chaplains praying in accordance with their own religious tradition under the full protection of the first amendment.

The 70th Synod of the BPC meeting in Grand Island, NY, from August 3-8, 2006, calls upon leaders in the executive and congressional branches of government to ensure that Christian chaplains in the military will be able to represent their denomination faithfully without fear of compromising the theological convictions of their endorsing agency.

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<sup>1</sup> Presbyterian and Reformed Joint Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel (PRJC) (28 October, 2005), response to the "Interim Guidelines on the Free Exercise of Religion" of the Air Force.