



Support the Troops Advocacy

Many men and women from central Minnesota are members of the United States military and are serving both in the United States and overseas. Some of these brave men and women will be returning home this summer. About the same time, others will be deployed, maybe for the second time. How does the Church and parish reach out to families while their loved-one is deployed? What are the soldiers and families needs during this time of separation? How does the parish community welcome the soldier home and assist the family through the subsequent months as they reintegrate?

To assist military families, an advocacy program is being initiated. An advocate is a person or persons in each parish who can coordinate the needs of the soldiers and families from their parish.

What is an advocate?

A person who may have some military background (retired military or spouse) who:

- Gathers the names of families by deployment.
- Coordinates communication between the soldier and their family and the parish.
- Has resource material available to assist the family through deployment and reintegration.
- Contacts the family periodically.
- Attends the initial training as well as up-dates (three times a year) to learn about the resources available to military families.



Parish Advocate Duties

Getting Started

- Find out who is deployed and who has served
 - Ask parish secretary to insert bulletin announcement in the parish bulletin(s). For example:

Support the Troops Advocacy Program: Many men and women from central Minnesota are members of the United States military and are serving both in the United States and overseas. To assist military families, an advocacy program has been initiated. An advocate is a person in the parish who can coordinate the needs of the soldiers and families. Do you know someone from our parish who, is or was recently deployed? Please contact (your name and phone number), our parish advocate so the family can be contacted and see how we can support them.

- Ask your pastor if you can make announcement at the end of Mass about the program and greet people after Mass, gathering the information.
- Remember, the soldier may be a parishioner, or a son, daughter, husband, wife, grandson, or daughter. Extended family members are in need of support too.

During deployment

- Contact the families to see how the parish can be of assistance:
 - Would the family be open to a visible awareness that their loved one is deployed? Ideas may include:
 - A poster board in Church with names and pictures of soldier.
 - Petitions during the liturgy, praying for the soldiers' safety.
 - Occasional up-dates on when the soldier is scheduled to return home.
 - Other ideas
 - Would the soldier be open for:
 - Letters from the parish—students and/or adults
 - Copies of the *St. Cloud Visitor* mailed to them. If they would like the Visitor, please call Paula at the Visitor (320) 251-3022 with name and military address and they will be put on the list.
 - Other ideas
 - Do they have need of physical assistance such as snow shoveling, cleaning the gutters, mowing the lawn, etc. If there are physical needs, as an advocate, consider contacting organizations within your parish to assist with these needs, such as the Faith Formation Coordinator to see if confirmation students could mow lawns, shovel snow, etc.; Knights of Columbus Council or Christian Women's groups for home repair, an occasional meal to be delivered to the house, etc.
- Keep in touch with the family.
 - An occasional phone call to see how they are doing.
 - Send a prayer box to the family (see box on back page.)
 - Send a card of encouragement and prayer support.





Homecoming

Contact the family prior to homecoming to see if they are open for any of the following ideas:

- Welcome Home Mass
- Special Blessing during Sunday liturgy
- Reception after Mass
- Letter from Pastor welcoming the soldier home
- Small gift from parish
- Other ideas

Contact newly returned soldier, introduce yourself and explain your role as parish advocate.

Reintegration

Keep in contact periodically with the family after the homecoming. Ask if there are any needs the parish can assist. Sometimes needs will not be evident until many months (years) later.

If married, encourage them to attend a Marriage Encounter, Marriage Enrichment day or other enrichment opportunity as a couple. Offer to secure babysitting for a night out.



Ideas of Physical Needs

Chop wood
Clean gutters
Give wedding/baby shower
Handyman (Minor Home Repairs)
Help with farm chores
Help with household chores
Mow lawns
Organize a birthday party
Paint or repair a fence
Pet sit
Plant flowers
Prepare & deliver a gift basket

Prepare and deliver meals
Purchase & deliver groceries
Rake leaves
Send cards or letters of encouragement
Shovel/plow sidewalks or driveways
Stain decks
Trim hedges
Wash cars
Wash windows
Weed gardens

Remember— you are not in this alone.

- Up-date your pastor occasionally on what you are doing.
- If needs come up and you need assistance in your work, ask to be on the parish council agenda and discuss it with them.
- Have ideas that really work well, share them with us.
- Have questions, call the Office of Marriage & Family (320) 252-4721.

Prayer Box for Military Families



- St. Michael the Archangel Prayer Card
- Guardian Angel Prayer Card
- Picture frame with magnet for picture of soldier that can be put on the frig
- Calendar to mark off the days until soldier returns
- Prayer candle
- Strips of red, white and blue paper to make paper chain for number of days left till soldier returns....

Other training opportunities:

October 1, 2007, the Diocese of St. Cloud will host the second Diocesan Ministry Day. Below are two opportunities for workshops offered during that day.

Supporting our Military Families Through Deployment and Reintegration with P.O.C. Chaplain (MAJ) John Morris and SSgt Jonna Miller.

Working with Children of Military Families with Gail Mossman. Children who have a parent, brother, sister or other loved one serving in the military can experience feelings of loneliness, fear, academic struggles, as well as a deep sense of pride. This workshop will inform on their unique issues, how they may react to each stage of the deployment cycle, the impact of media, and how to develop resiliency with appropriate support.

For more information and to receive a conference booklet, please call us at the Office of Marriage & Family at 320-252-4721 or outside the St. Cloud area 1-800-624-9019.

PRAYER FOR THOSE SERVING IN THE MILITARY

Praise to you, ever-watchful God,
for you are our refuge and strength
in every time and place.

Send your blessing upon those
who are serving our country
in the armed forces.

By your powerful Spirit,
shield them from all harm.

Uphold them in good times and bad,
especially when danger threatens.

Let your peace be the sentry
that stands guard over their lives,
so that they may return home safely.

Look with compassion on all victims of war;
ease their sufferings and heal their wounds.

Put an end to wars over all the earth,
and hasten the day when the human family
will rejoice in lasting peace.

Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns as the Prince of Peace,
both now and for ever. Amen.

+ John F. Kinney
Bishop of Saint Cloud, MN

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