

From the Armed Forces Champion

Every Presbytery in the Church has appointed an Armed Forces Champion, whose role is to link the Presbytery with the Armed Forces Community, local military and cadet chaplains, and the General Assembly's Committee on Chaplains to HM Forces.

The Champion can help to make connections for you when a pastoral issue arises that involves a Forces family living in your parish area, or find out where to ask about support available from military charities, or point ministers in the right direction to find out more about serving as Regular, Reservist or Cadet chaplains.

NENI's Champion is Rev Dr Marjory MacLean, one of the team ministers in Orkney. She can be contacted on mmaclean@churchofscotland.org.uk or 07837 784893; please don't hesitate to give her a shout if you think she can help with anything.

Perhaps the most important task of the Champions is to promote and encourage prayer for our Armed Forces, their personnel, chaplains, families and veterans. Since it is easier to pray when you have a little understanding of someone's situation, here are two short articles, provided by one Regular and one Reservist chaplain serving within our Presbytery area. We are grateful to Andrew and Michael for taking the time to share the nature of their work.

Reservists are (usually) normal, everyday people. They are civilians whose military service is undertaken in addition and alongside their jobs and family life. Across the North East of Scotland, you will find your colleagues and neighbours serving in military settings which include as communication specialists, infanteers, mounted, and medical roles. Other than a 16-day continuous annual continuous training package, training is kept to evenings and weekends to fit in to family and work life. While it can sometimes be a challenge to balance the demands of reserve service, most reservists find that the collegiality and comradeship they find in their units mean that they stay involved for years. Service as a reservist sees people given training to ensure that they have the basic skills required to augment those in the regular forces if required, including physical fitness training and coaching, and can see voluntary deployment on operations around the world. In addition, adventure training is regularly put on to develop skills and enhance team building within units.

Reservists are often called up when local needs are most pressing under what is known as MACA operations (Military Aid to Civilian Authorities). This occurs when local councils request the aid of the military in responding to a particular crisis. Recent MACA taskings have included the response to the COVID pandemic, as well as more localised assignments during flooding, and extreme weather. As local people, reservists bring their local knowledge as well as their training and access to specialised equipment to ensure quick and successful outcomes.

There are currently only around 5,320 reservists in Scotland. Please remember all of them in your prayers.

Padre Michael Mair, Army Reserve

The primary role of RAF Chaplaincy is to uphold and contribute to the Moral Component of Airpower through the provision of spiritual, moral and pastoral support at every level both to those serving in the RAF and those serving as civilians. This happens at RAF Lossiemouth at every level where interactions take place between Chaplains and those who are serving here. It is vital that there is a clear understanding of the underlying purpose of the RAF and of how this is worked out through serving on the Station, and through time spent away from home on deployment.

All personnel at RAF Lossiemouth, both serving in the RAF and civilian, together with their families, receive Chaplaincy support. This is offered on a 24/7 basis, with there always being one of the Chaplaincy Team holding the duty phone in case of a pastoral emergency.

The Chaplaincy Team are based at the St Aidan's Centre on the Station. Prayers are said each morning in the Station Church and the Padres spend each day visiting the flying squadrons, engineering flights and administrative hubs, as well as being available to meet with those who request counsel or a listening ear. During the Arrivals Briefs, given regularly for the constant influx new personnel, we make it clear to those attending, that as Padres we are here to support all personnel and their families regardless of what they might or might not believe, and that they can be confident that whatever they choose to share with us will remain in strict confidence, and that we are non-judgemental. Instead, we emphasise that our concern is to help each individual reach their full potential whatever may have happened up until that point.

The Chaplaincy Team work closely with the Station Welfare Team, SSAFA (Sailors, Soldiers, Air Force Association) a civilian charity, and the Community Support Team, as well as having close contact with the Medical Services based on the station.

Every Sunday a service is held for those who work on the Station and their families, and during the week there is an informal gathering with a meal for Bible Study and prayer.

The Chaplaincy Team lead regular services for the Station throughout the year, such as Remembrance, Canada Day, and ANZAC Day, as well as memorial services that take place either in St Aidan's Church or on location wherever in Scotland a significant event or tragedy has occurred. The team receive regular requests to conduct weddings, baptisms and funerals for personnel connected to the Station. We also receive invitations to lead services in local churches and take assemblies in local schools.

We fully understand that we are part of the wider church in this area, and to that end were delighted recently to host the Bishop of Moray, Mark Strange and clergy of the diocese for a day, where we were able to introduce them to the Station, and help them understand something of the work we do here.

We count the opportunity to minister as chaplains in such an organisation a huge privilege. Please remember in your prayers all those who serve at RAF Lossiemouth and their families, who regularly make great personal sacrifices for the sake of keeping our nation safe.

Padre Andrew Tucker, RAF Lossiemouth