

*Religious Support Operations in Joint Task Force (FWD) Katrina,  
CH (MAJ) Ira Houck, September 2005.*

The purpose of this report is to provide an after action review of the Religious Support Operations (RSO) conducted by the Joint Task Force-Katrina (Forward) Religious Support Team (RST) assembled by the Joint Task Force, First U.S. Army Chaplain (JTF CH).

Hurricane Katrina, a Category 4 hurricane, struck the Gulf coast in late August 2005. Consequently, this region suffered extensive storm damage. Much of the city of New Orleans stood in ruins due to flooding from weakened levees, fierce winds and storm surge. The Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Emergency Management Agency responded together with the U.S. Coast Guard and National Guard units from Mississippi and Louisiana. Other State Guards also mobilized with Joint Forces of the Army, Marine Corps, Navy and Air Force. The government mobilized over a corps of military personnel to assist with this American disaster.

National Guard units from other states arrived in Louisiana at the invitation of the Governor. The President authorized elements of the Marine Corps and the 82d Airborne Division to assist civil authorities in re-establishing order in the city of New Orleans and to assist in disaster relief efforts of the surrounding parishes.

U.S. Northern Command (NC) designated First Army Commander to head Joint Task Force Katrina. JTF-Katrina deployed forward to Camp Shelby, Mississippi, providing Defense Support to Civil Authorities (DSCA) in the Joint Operations Area, the city of New Orleans and in the surrounding states of Louisiana and Mississippi.

The JTF CH, with approval from the Joint Task Force Commander, assembled a special Joint Forces Religious Support Team (RST) of chaplains and chaplain assistants from all the service branches to supply a special need of the Joint Task Forces command. The Army, Navy and Marine Corps are capable of tasking individual chaplains and assistants but rarely task separately from their units or vessels of assignment. In federal emergencies of this kind special Joint religious support doctrine guides the selection of RST members. JP 1-05 states:

Joint Task Force Chaplains (JTF CHs) involved in Defense Support to Civil Authorities (DSCA) missions should consider Title 10, Title 14 (Coast Guard), and Title 32 USC. Unique issues exist related to DSCA. When DSCA occurs, the lead federal agency through the federal coordinating officer, the defense coordinating officer, and/or the JFC will initiate requests for military chaplains. Requests for military chaplains will be coordinated through U.S. Northern Command.

The Navy, Army and Air Force are able to reallocate, or “cross-level” RST personnel to meet emergency Civil Support (CS) requirements. For example, the Air Force has a built-in capability to deploy RSTs independent of their assigned wing. The Rotating

Army is seeing more reallocation of Unit Ministry Teams, or “cross-level” personnel to fill vacancies in deploying combat units.

Such was the case in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina. Surveying the storm’s damage, the Joint Task Force Chaplain (JTF CH) assessed the religious needs of Joint Forces (JF) and developed a plan to meet those needs with a special Joint Forces religious support team. JTF CH established a religious support operations cell consisting of four religious support teams (RST) to conduct direct religious support operations (RSO).

Conducting Joint area religious support operations (RSO) in a national emergency like the devastation of New Orleans is essentially the same as in Joint stability and sustainment operations (SOSO). The assembled RST first arrived at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, JTF Katrina Forward to prepare for deployment. Then the JTF CH sent the first RST forward. It consisted of three members; an Army chaplain, a Navy chaplain and a Navy Religious Program Specialist. They traveled in a rented civilian SUV to New Orleans to serve as the JTF CH liaison with the active Army and Navy units in the city.

This RST did not function as a first responder during the immediate emergency. That role fell to other National Guard units and their respective RST. National Guard units together with the U.S. Coast Guard, Navy, Marine Corps and Task Force 82d Airborne effectively provided first responder federal assistance to civilian authorities. These units provided security and safely removed most evacuees by the time the first JTF Katrina RST arrived in the city. JP 1-05 substantiates the role of the military as first responders:

Local, county, and state resources, including National Guard forces under Title 32, normally constitute the first line of response to crisis management and consequence management events. Therefore, as a general rule, chaplains in Title 10 status will not be the first to respond to a natural or manmade disaster.

The Joint area religious support operations (RSO) of JTF Katrina represented the full spectrum of professional duties performed by Religious Support Teams (RST) in their dual role as professional military religious leaders and as principle advisors to the Command on matters of religion affecting the mission. RSTs supported Joint Forces conducting Military Assistance to Civil Authorities (DSCA) throughout the duration of the mission and performed both roles effectively. Joint area RSTs stood along side Sailors, Guardsman and Paratroopers, coordinating religious support on board ship and opened their chapels at Naval Air Stations for DoD personnel. RSTs provided continuous religious support and they demonstrated what the religious support doctrines of the military describe. Navy NWP 1-05, chapter 7 states:

Expediting the provision of Religious Ministry (RM) requires a spirit of professional collegiality, immediate cooperation, and coordinated focus of effort. The chaplain’s insignia becomes a powerful restorative and comforting symbol for survivors, rescue workers, families of victims, and the community in general.

Joint RSO expanded across the total JOA. All RSO fortified the Joint Force Commander's emergency response plans. The comprehensive integration of religious support operations was the means by which the free exercise of religion for service members and DoD personnel occurred in the JOA. Full spectrum RSO resided in the capabilities of the Joint Task Force Chaplain (JTF CH).

The primary concern of the JTF CH was to provide and promote comprehensive religious support for all service members. As defined in JP 3-26 (*Joint Doctrine for Homeland Security*) and JP 1-05 (*Joint Doctrine for Religious Support*), Joint area religious support is religious support provided to all DoD personnel of whatever service component or status. Joint area religious support also includes those service members who are not part of the Religious Support Team (RST) unit of assignment, but who operate within the Joint Operational Area (JOA).

While JTF service members define their military RS needs, it is the RST--with their professional skills, understanding of the unique JIM environment and the closed military culture, net-centric capability, and their dedicated mission to Soldier-care and spiritual well-being of the same that integrates RSO successfully. Service members remained the core focus of JTF RST.

The Joint Task Force Chaplain (JTF CH) retained total operational authority over all Religious Support assets in the JOA by virtue of his relationship to the JTF CDR. The JTF CH ensured that Joint area RSO were employed as necessary. One significant disruption to RSO emerged when a chaplain failed to notify the JTF CH of a significant religious service with members of Congress in attendance. Despite an occasional oversight by chaplains unfamiliar with Joint concepts, the JTF CH remained the integrator of RSO and the overseer or agent to integrate, sustain, and employ RS within the JOA. The JTF CH orchestrated personal and professional delivery of RSO to DoD personnel and service members in every Joint command context.

In addition, the JTF CH managed connectivity between Joint Force RSTs and other helping resources for unique religious support requirements. Maintaining daily SITREPS minimized misinformation and disinformation. Continuous reporting remained essential to situational awareness and coordinated efforts to provide RS. The JTF CH required daily SITREPS from the RST to ensure accuracy and accountability in a constantly fluid environment. RSO changed frequently with each developing CS mission. Continual change in mission requirements required adaptive RSO planning and execution by the RST.

According to Joint doctrine (JP 1-05 and JP 3-26) and when mission requires it, the JTF CH may instruct Navy chaplains in the Joint Task Force to provide RS to Army and Air Force personnel in units under the OPCON of the JFC. When the RST saw a religious need they acted to provide for it. The JOA often required the RST to coordinate religious services with units not assigned to their immediate area. For example, an Army Protestant Chaplain conducted a worship service on board the USS IWO JIMA because the ship had no Protestant chaplain. In another example, an Army Reserve rabbi serving

the JTF staff conducted Jewish religious services for both active duty Sailors and Soldiers. An Air Force Protestant chaplain provided Army NG and active duty Soldiers with religious counseling and a religious service because they had no Army chaplain. The RST Air Force chaplain assistant helped Army chaplains provide RS and the Navy RPS did the same. Joint doctrine substantiates this kind of coordinated area coverage in the JOA.

JP 3-26 states that active component RSTs, when directed by the Command, may provide RSO to National Guard personnel serving in State Active Duty (SAD-State controlled, State funded) or Title 32 (State controlled, Federal funded) status.

The converse may also be true. In coordination with the National Guard Bureau and Joint Force Headquarters-State (JFHQ-State), and when directed by USNORTHCOM, National Guard chaplains in SAD or Title 32 status may provide Joint area religious support to active component personnel in Title 10 status.

The JTF CH ensured the free exercise of religion, imparted ethical guidance, advised the command on religious issues affecting civil support (CS) operations, and provided spiritual care in support of assigned task force personnel. The JTF CH also maintained operational and tactical religious support coordination and oversight of JTF religious support assets.

JTF CH provided command with a plan for religious coverage and professional advice regarding the dynamic influence of religious beliefs on operations in the JOA. Military chaplains assigned to the JTF held to their primary mission: to provide religious support to eligible DoD personnel. RSTs were willing to assist civilian authorities, if requested in accordance with Joint doctrine but the focus of the mission remained with the MA teams.

In some circumstances military chaplains provided limited RS to civilians. In one example, the USS Iwo Jima's Catholic priest conducted Mass for Army Soldiers and mobilized National Guardsman. At his Mass, members of the New Orleans Police Department attended the religious service conducted for military service members. This service was limited to one event and held under extreme circumstances.

JP 3-26 provides clear guidance. If requested by the Primary Agency, the RST may also assist local, State, and other Federal authorities in alleviating human suffering and restoring communities following disasters, catastrophic events. However, the primary concern of the JTF CH and the RSTs in the JOA remained the religious needs of service members and DoD personnel.

Joint Publication 3-26, *Joint Doctrine for Homeland Security*, 2 August 2005, allays concerns regarding perceived violations of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and contains a broad discussion of planning considerations for employment of Federal military chaplains during Civilian Support. JP 3-26 says:

Military chaplains may provide religious support to civilian disaster victims during emergency operations. This ministry will be limited to the designated disaster control area and will cease with the termination of emergency operations. Moreover, the primary focus of military chaplain ministry will remain DOD personnel (See JP 1-05, *Religious Support for Joint Operations* for more information and JP 3-26, Chapter IV, para. 6.2).

During emergency operations in the aftermath of Katrina, military chaplains provided very limited religious support activities to and with civilians. Clear guidelines exist in JP 3-26. RSTs may provide support to civilians, if directed by commanders or requested by the Primary Agency for a limited time under special circumstances. RSTs must follow military regulations and uphold the First Amendment of the Constitution which does not permit the establishment of a federal religion. Such an establishment could be argued successively if chaplains violate constitutional restraints and hold religious services on street corners for everyone.

JP 3-26 offers clear guidance. If the Primary Agency determines, in coordination with local and State authorities, that additional caregivers are needed following a large-scale disaster, the Primary Agency may request DoD chaplains to provide care, counseling, humanitarian relief or informational services to civilian victims. Military chaplains have the training and credentials to fulfill such requests. These practices can not violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. These practices must serve a distinct purpose for a limited time. Religious support functions under the authority of the command.

JP 3-26 states that RSO to non-DoD civilians is permissible when it conforms to the following general planning considerations. These suggested considerations serve as parameters to strike a careful balance between the Establishment and Free Exercise Clauses of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Therefore, commanders and DCOs (defense coordinating officers) will examine each request and situation employing the following planning considerations as described in the Joint Publication:

First, RSO to non-DoD civilians may not interfere with the primary mission of religious support to troops. In certain disaster relief settings, military chaplains will encounter non-DoD civilians while accompanying troops.

Secondly, chaplains may respond to the voluntary requests of non-DoD civilians for religious support when such requests are incidental. Incidental requests are secondary, and may not interfere with the primary purpose of troop ministry.

Thirdly, consistent with historic DoD practice, regulations and instructions, non-DoD civilians may voluntarily participate in religious services, rites, observances, ministrations and rituals if such services are generally open to the public. New Orleans Policemen attended Catholic Mass when the Navy priest held services for Guardsman.

The primary mission of the RST in the JTF is to support the command to which they are assigned. JP 3-26 specifies that conforming to a NC OPORD, EXORD or Religious Support Plan (RSP), any RST assigned to the Joint Task Force may also be responsible to provide joint area religious support to units without assigned chaplains, and to personnel from shortage or minority faith groups.

The JTF Katrina Assault RST consisted of eight members. The four chaplains consisted of one active duty Army (Major) Catholic priest, one Army Reserve (Colonel) orthodox rabbi, one active duty Navy (Commander) Protestant chaplain, one active duty Air Force (Lieutenant Colonel) Protestant chaplain and one active duty Army (Major) Protestant chaplain. The JTF CH (First U. S. Army) held the rank of Colonel and was a member of the JTF Commander's personal staff. The four RST chaplain assistants represented the Navy, Army and Air Force and held the rank of E4 through E7.

The RST had a vital supporting role in achieving JTF CH operational objectives by providing situational awareness with current, accurate information briefs transmitted by civilian cellular telephones. The RST coordinated with the TF 82d Airborne, with Naval RSTs on board ships and with JOB NAS Orleans, the Naval Support Activities Center and with the ANG. After initial coordination, the RST's mission shifted to providing direct religious support to the MA teams.

The RST integrated a religious support plan into the mission. This plan included opportunities for worship, the utilization of religious resources, and the exercise of religious counseling and personal consideration of every soldier's religious need. Service members defined their spiritual care needs within their own unique environment. The RST integrated RS into all CS environments to address the defined need, with specific action such as accompanying MA teams on recovery missions, and maintaining situational awareness by attending nightly battle update briefs (BUBs).

The JTF CH configured the RST to mission requirements. The RST normally consisted of at least one chaplain and an enlisted assistant of the same service. The RST effectively functioned on a number of occasions with more than two service members, but at least two members of the team were of the same service.

The JTF CH deployed a three-member RST forward from Camp Shelby to New Orleans (consisting of one Army and one Navy chaplain with one Navy enlisted religious program specialist) to function as the liaison with other RS assets operating in the immediate disaster area. The RST arrived in New Orleans and immediately coordinated with TF 82d Airborne, with the 35<sup>th</sup> INF (ANG) and with the supporting Naval assets.

The RST remained service member-focused, spiritually based, professional, and systems integrated. Mortuary Affairs and their commander continuously looked to the RST for direct religious support. As the principal religious advisor to the command, the RST enhanced humanity in the midst of inhumane conditions, injected hope, and provided religious leadership.

The RST provided critical capabilities for mission accomplishment. As MA teams deployed into the city, the RST accompanied them. The RST rotated chaplains and chaplain assistants with each new mission. In general, chaplains provided or performed direct religious support, to include Rites, Sacraments, and Ordinances; religious care and counseling; management and administration; and spiritual fitness through comprehensive religious support. RST capabilities provided mission essential support during Joint Task Force operations in this civil emergency. The RST demonstrated the following five characteristics:

1. Responsiveness. Responsiveness has the quality of time, distance, and sustained momentum. The RST responded to events and incidents as quickly as possible in order to use its competencies and resources to achieve the most effective impact on the situation. The RST maintained responsiveness in RSO through effective communications, coordination and cooperation among its members and with the command's needs.
2. Deployability. The RST deployed rapidly within the forward regions of the JOA. The deployment required careful planning and the use of rental vehicles for each RST.
3. Agility. At the operational level of RSO, agility describes the mental and physical ability of the RST to transition rapidly from one operation to another and back again. This agility is needed in stability operations where requirements can vary greatly. Agility is tied to initiative.
4. Versatility. Versatility describes the inherent capacity of RST formations to prevail at any point in the spectrum of RSO. RST formations are capable of adapting to mission changes with minimal adjustment. RSTs must be equipped and trained for critical incident stress management.
5. Sustainability. Sustainability describes the operational skills of the RST to maintain spiritual fitness, mission awareness, mission rhythm and logistical support to sustain the team. RSTs are more effective if they are assured of shelter, food, water, transportation and hygienic support. Vital to any mission is the morale and spirit of the team. RSTs remained attuned to the religious needs of their service members as they performed the disciplines of their own faith traditions. They also sustained one another by attending religious services and meeting nightly to review the issues of the day.

Coordination and collaboration between RSTs remained essential. Mitigation and recovery following disasters and catastrophic events required all local, State, Federal and nongovernmental resources to operate in a cooperative partnership. Military chaplains also worked in partnership to provide care to military personnel during CS.

As a rule, military chaplains in Title 10 status were not the first to respond to this natural disaster. National Guard chaplains in SAD or Title 32 status assigned to responding units arrived with their units and responded first. The JFHQ-State Staff Chaplain is responsible for coordinating religious support for National Guard forces serving in SAD or Title 32 status. State National Guard forces coordinated disaster response through the

National Guard Bureau (NGB). In this case, states invoked Emergency Assistance Compacts (EMAC) to request assistance from other States.

Policies and procedures emerged to ensure coordination of the activities of State and Federal military chaplains. N-NC/HC coordinated chaplain response with NGB and the involved JFHQ-State Staff Chaplain, to the maximum extent possible. In particular, N-NC/HC coordinated chaplain response with the NGB Joint Chaplain Emergency Response Team (JCERT), a chaplain cell assigned to the NGB JOC.

TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-07, *Homeland Security Concept*, June 2004, provided guidance to JTF CH for planning RSO in this disaster. Katrina demonstrates the necessity of preparation to support U.S. citizens in disaster relief. RST organizations must be tailor-made for domestic emergency operations.

Future homeland missions will require RST design capable of providing RSO to uniquely configured units, like the MA teams and its recovery of human remains from a city flooded by hurricane and destroyed levees. To conduct emergency operations in the homeland, RST design should incorporate the following trinity of tailor-made, modular design and function-based:

1. Capable of Being Tailored for RSO Roles. Response will often be to augment the capabilities of civil authorities as the military responds to disasters.
2. Modular Design. RSTs must retain the ability to quickly task organize with multifunctional service members to provide the flexibility required in supporting RSO. This modular design will provide the versatility and agility needed for RSO in homeland disaster. RSTs must also be able to build up or scale down through mission tailoring.
3. Function-Based. The Joint Force will need RSTs capable of being tailored to facilitate function-based task organization. Using the principal of modular design, RSTs can be rapidly organized for function-based tasks. Examples include military assistance to a flooded city, providing specialized MA response teams to an incident involving numerous sudden deaths.

After the disaster in New Orleans civil assets were unable to meet surge requirements and so they requested support from federal assistance. Following a period of military support the situation improved. Civil authorities increased their capabilities allowing for the cessation of military support.

Although the JTF CH relied heavily upon its core competencies and inherent capabilities while conducting RSO there are also RS specific needs. The following capabilities must be available to the JTF CH as it conducts RSO:

1. Inter-service coordination, integration, and communication. A collaborative information environment and the Joint RST must be configured to support military operations. Selected personnel must be trained in Joint religious support doctrine, and in



the procedures and capabilities of critical stress management, and they must have relevant communications equipment and technology to maintain effective communication between RSTs above, below and across. Necessary equipment must be planned for and made readily available.

2. Search and Recovery Religious Support. The capability inherent in military units to provide search and recovery of human remains (HR) is one often required by Mortuary Affairs teams. MA teams assisted civil authorities in the recovery of HR at hospitals in New Orleans. RSTs accompanied the MA teams to care for the living soldier who must perform the recovery. RSTs must be capable of providing RS to service members conducting HR recovery missions as service members search for the deceased in such places as hospitals devastated by floods or operate in a crisis situation to assist in retrieving lost or stranded civilians. It is likely that RSTs will be required to assist such operations in the future.

3. Religious Leadership in Consolation, Community and Confidence. Historically, RSTs provided the Joint Force with professional military religious leaders to console frightened and anxious souls, to build community and esprit de corps during crisis; and, to enliven personal courage, confidence in military training through religious services and in the presence of religious leaders with their service members. During times of great stress and crisis when mission requirements far exceed the capacity of any one person, the RST must remain capable of providing these types of essential religious operations.

All RSTs must continuously emphasize the critical need to be appropriately trained in critical incident stress management, ensuring the free exercise of religion, providing comprehensive religious support. While responsiveness is essential to reacting to any threat, the RST must ensure that proactive religious care through deliberate planning occurs in order to prevent events before they occur. Likewise, when crisis events occur response capabilities must be available from RSTs to ensure that the wounded soldier receives required care, that the dead are honored and the living are nurtured.

Thus far this report surveys important elements of doctrine; the capabilities available to conduct religious support to soldiers and citizens in the homeland. These capabilities have traditional constraints and emerging new possibilities. In the next few paragraphs this report considers lessons learned from the mission in New Orleans.

With the establishment of collaboration and collegiality between the command chaplains in the JF, the JTF CH directed the RST to provide religious support for the Mortuary Affairs (MA) Company of the 54<sup>th</sup> Quarter Master, in the 13<sup>th</sup> COSCOM. The mission focus of the RST shifted from a liaison function to a function of being providers of direct religious support to the Mortuary Affairs Company from Fort Lee.

What lessons did the RST learn from this direct support to Soldiers conducting human remains recovery after a civil disaster? This report offers three elements from one Army chaplain in the RST. The first lesson is what was done right and should be sustained.

The second lesson is what was not done right and ought to be changed. The third lesson is what might we do better and can be improved.

The first lesson is what the team did well. The lesson falls under the “three Cs” of collaboration, communication and collegiality. The team of chaplains and chaplain assistants demonstrated a continuous willingness to work together for the Soldiers’ well-being. The RST reported to the JTF CH regularly each day. The reporting consisted of regular SITREPs and updates as needed. Issues could be addressed immediately as they emerged with little confusion. The RST kept in constant contact with one another in an ever changing environment. The JTF CH came forward to visit the team and assessed first-hand the situation. The RST maintained constant communication, an essential element of collaboration and collegiality.

The RST maintained continuous accompaniment (ministry of presence) with the Soldiers of the MA unit by living with them, moving with them and shadowing their missions daily. The RST sustained situational awareness through attendance at mission briefs and MA meetings. The RST also exercised a ministry of compassion, of suffering with and for the Soldier.

Every hardship of the Soldier was also the hardship of the RST. The support mission requires presence, patience and persistence. RSTs assigned to the JTF CH maintained a rotational duty roster. One RST conducted RSO while another team stood ready (on deck) to provide additional support and launched as needed. The reserve RST conducted administrative support (in the hole) and monitored the mission. One RST stood down for recovery. Cleaning uniforms and personal hygiene was mission essential. Command required that MA teams and RSTs go to the decontamination site for a wash down prior to their return to base camp. Command required MA to shower daily after each mission.

The RST remained with the Soldiers, patiently looking for opportunity to provide or perform religious support and persisting in efforts to be available for the Soldier’s religious needs. The chaplain assistants provided a valuable network of information especially with the younger, lower ranking Soldiers. Chaplain assistants shared important information at the nightly RST meetings.

The RST remained flexible and positive. As one chaplain stated in a nightly meeting, “I could not get my message across in these situations unless I made some accommodations with the environment and remained flexible.” The chaplain was referring to the constant change in the mission of the MA and the “hostile environment” caused by severe weather and threatening physical conditions wrought by the hurricane disaster.

The second lesson involved improving communication channels. The RST initially launched into an unknown area of operations without proper communications equipment. The order to move forward did not have a proper plan for communication equipment other than the private cellular phones of the individual team members. Although one chaplain did sign out a military satellite phone, there wasn’t a sufficient number for each team. Communications remained a challenge due to the loss of signal and limited tower

coverage. Without private phones, the mission of liaison for the JTF CH would have been severely hampered. JTF CH should equip forward RSTs with necessary communications equipment to fulfill requirements of the mission.

The third lesson is what the team might do better. The best kind of religious support is visible and available. To be sure, the chaplains and their assistants circulated and accompanied the MA Soldier regularly. The team could improve even more with its personal contact with Soldiers between missions by being out among Soldiers listening, preferably in small numbers. A technique that worked after each mission was to sit in the dining area with a cup of water or coffee. Soldiers would stop, sit down and talk with the chaplain or chaplain assistant. The fact that the RST accompanied the MA units on recovery missions led to a familiarity that opened doors for conversation and prayer.

Another method was to sit by the water chest filled with ice and distribute cold cups of water to the teams returning from searches. MA Soldiers identified the RST with relief, rest and refreshment which served as a powerful symbol for continuous religious support. More of the same quality of care is necessary to enhance relationships with service members.

RSTs must be better prepared to endure the hardships of disaster relief and be prepared to deal with some emerging depression that follows each mission. A common experience after each mission among Soldiers and RST members alike was emotional exhaustion. Some mild depression surfaced after each mission resulting from the impact of scenes of massive destruction and the pungent smells of decaying matter. It is vital to the health of the Soldier and the RST that they share their experiences with one another and avail themselves of the caring capabilities from their peers. When a peer is not able to assist, immediate referral to the chaplain is necessary. Neither the Soldier nor the RST is immune to the negative emotional impact caused by disaster in the homeland.

RSTs operated in a supportive role. They functioned as a team of religious leaders and advisors to the command on matters of religion and morale affecting the mission. The leadership capabilities of the chaplain assistant remained essential to the mission of religious support. The intense command interest in preventive programs has increased the need for chaplain assistants who can do more than simply provide clerical support.

The Army Chaplaincy is writing new doctrine for wartime religious operations which will impact the way RSTs provide religious support during CS as well. Traditionally, Army training has been battle-focused based on a battlefield with clearly defined parameters. In the cities of Iraq and on the battlefield of the future, however, RSTs will serve in widely dispersed, smaller configurations. They will encounter a more lethal battle space. To provide optimum impact and effect, the role of the chaplain assistant as a "mission multiplier" must be actualized, engaged and utilized as a full and contributing member. Chaplain assistants will require the same preparatory training for Civil Support (CS) missions.

The RST will struggle with the tension between change of mission and maintaining continuity of care for our service members. Flexibility is crucial to religious operations that meet the religious needs of service members. RSTs perform supportive operations and function as providers of religious operations and maintain a positive attitude. Recovery time is vital to continuous religious operations in the midst of widespread disaster and managing critical stress. RSTs practiced mission readiness circulating with Soldiers when not on mission and providing religious services daily for Soldiers at the end of each day.

It was Abraham Lincoln who said, "Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith, let us to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it." The RST performed religious support in the uncharted flood waters of New Orleans. They performed ministry in troubled waters and on solid ground. The RST remained with Soldiers of the MA unit throughout the mission and when the mission ceased to need them, they re-deployed to home-station in the knowledge that they did their duty as they understood it and they did it to the best of their ability.

Pro Deo et Patria!