

STATEMENT OF THE ANGLICAN CATHOLIC CHURCH OF CANADA

Concerning Canadian Armed Forces Military Personnel Instructions 03/26 – “Spiritual Reflections in Military Settings”

**For Immediate Release
August 21, 2026**

The Anglican Catholic Church of Canada expresses its profound concern and strong opposition to the Canadian Armed Forces Military Personnel Instructions 03/26, issued on July 29, 2026, concerning “Spiritual reflections in military settings.”

The Anglican Catholic Church of Canada has priests serving as chaplains in the Canadian Armed Forces. We therefore have a particular pastoral and ecclesial interest in this matter, and we stand in solidarity with all military chaplains who are being asked to reconcile this new directive with the sacred obligations of their priestly vocation.

A chaplain is not a secular motivational speaker

The new instruction defines a “spiritual reflection” as an inclusive public address intended to foster meaning, purpose and spiritual well-being. It then expressly provides that such reflections “do not use religious specific language, including references to God.”

The instruction further directs that, at official military ceremonies where prayers or religious observances have been requested, chaplains must offer a “spiritual reflection” instead. This applies to such occasions as graduation parades, changes of command, ship commissioning, commemorative ceremonies, honours and awards ceremonies, seasonal or mess dinners, and other institutional commemorations, including Remembrance Day and the commemorations of Canada's military heritage.

This is deeply troubling.

A Christian priest who is asked to pray cannot faithfully perform that ministry by delivering a secular reflection from which God has deliberately been excluded. Prayer is not merely a particular literary style of “spiritual reflection.” Christian prayer is an act of worship addressed to the living God.

For an Anglican Catholic priest, prayer is not an optional addition to chaplaincy. It is intrinsic to the vocation to which he has been ordained.

A chaplain is not simply a provider of generalized emotional support, nor is he a government employee whose religious convictions are to be set aside whenever he addresses a military assembly. He is a minister of the Church, serving the spiritual needs of those entrusted to his pastoral care.

Religious neutrality must not become religious censorship

We recognize and affirm the obligation of the Canadian Armed Forces to respect the religious freedom of every member of the military, including those who profess no religious faith.

Indeed, military chaplaincy has long provided precisely this ministry of care: priests, ministers, rabbis, imams, and other religious and spiritual leaders serving members of diverse convictions while respecting the conscience and dignity of everyone.

The CAF instruction itself acknowledges that chaplains have an essential role as specialists in spiritual and religious matters and that CAF members possess freedom of religion under section 2(a) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

But religious neutrality does not mean the suppression of religious expression.

The Catholic Military Ordinariate has rightly observed that the policy appears to rest upon a fundamental misunderstanding of state neutrality. The Canadian Charter protects freedom of conscience and religion, as well as freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression. The Supreme Court of Canada has made clear that state neutrality requires the state neither to favour nor to hinder religious belief or non-belief.

The Anglican Catholic Church of Canada shares this concern.

If a Muslim chaplain cannot invoke Allah, if a Jewish chaplain cannot invoke God, and if a Christian chaplain cannot invoke the Holy Trinity or the name of Jesus Christ when delivering an address that is properly religious in character, the result is not religious neutrality. It is the removal of religious expression from the public sphere.

The government has not thereby created a neutral space. It has instead imposed a particular conception of what constitutes an acceptable public expression of spirituality.

The policy creates an artificial distinction between “spiritual” and “religious”

The instruction acknowledges that spiritual reflection may occur without religious belief. We do not dispute this.

What we dispute is the assumption that because spirituality can exist without religion, religious spirituality must therefore be excluded from an official “spiritual reflection.”

For Christians, and for many members of other religious traditions, meaning, purpose, hope, remembrance, sacrifice and human dignity cannot adequately be separated from God.

The Catholic Military Ordinary has expressed this point particularly well, noting that for many chaplains and military members “meaning, purpose, and spiritual well being” cannot be separated from God. The Ordinary further cautioned that compelling people to separate these things from their sincerely held beliefs raises precisely the kind of concern for conscience that the Charter exists to protect.

We agree.

The answer to religious diversity is not to remove religion from public religious ministry. The answer is to allow different religious traditions to speak authentically while respecting the conscience and freedom of those who do not share them.

The CAF's own policy recognizes the importance of chaplains—and then restricts their public ministry

The instruction states that chaplains are “leaders” who contribute to a CAF member's search for meaning and the integration of deeply held beliefs with military service.

Yet it simultaneously tells those same chaplains that, when acting in certain public military settings, they must not use words, actions or symbols specific to their religious tradition and must substitute a non-religious “spiritual reflection” when prayer has been requested.

This creates a serious contradiction.

The CAF says that chaplains are uniquely qualified to minister to the spiritual and religious needs of its members. Yet when a chaplain is asked to exercise that ministry publicly, he may be prohibited from speaking in the religious language that gives his ministry its meaning.

The instruction itself says that chaplains remain free to pray and provide religious care in private counselling, faith-specific gatherings, worship, and other religious settings.

We welcome those protections.

But they do not answer the fundamental question: **why should a priest who is serving as a chaplain be permitted to pray as a priest in one military setting but forbidden to pray as a priest in another, merely because the second occasion is designated an official public ceremony?**

Prayer has always been part of the military tradition

For generations, Canadian military chaplains have prayed with and for Canada's sailors, soldiers and aviators.

They have prayed before battle and after battle. They have prayed at times of grief and times of celebration. They have prayed for those who serve and for those who have died. They have

blessed ships and colours, accompanied military families through bereavement, and stood beside members in moments of extraordinary courage, fear, sacrifice and loss.

The CAF itself acknowledges this history. The new instruction recognizes that regimental and service prayers, regimental graces and patron saints have been part of Canadian military history for generations and have provided comfort, purpose and continuity.

That history should not be treated as an embarrassment from which the modern Canadian Armed Forces must distance itself.

Canada's military tradition has been profoundly shaped by Christian faith, while also making room for the religious traditions of Canadians of many other faiths. The proper response to that history is neither compulsory religious observance nor compulsory secularization.

It is freedom.

We are particularly concerned for the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces

The Anglican Catholic Church of Canada is concerned not only for its priests serving as chaplains, but for the military personnel whom they serve.

Members of the Armed Forces routinely encounter circumstances that most civilians will never experience: danger, separation from family, death, injury, moral injury, responsibility for the lives of others, and the burden of decisions made under extraordinary conditions.

They deserve chaplains who can minister to the whole person.

A military member who asks a priest to pray should be able to receive an authentic Christian prayer.

A military member who asks a Muslim chaplain to pray should be able to receive an authentic Muslim prayer.

A member who asks a Jewish chaplain to pray should be able to receive an authentic Jewish prayer.

And a member who does not believe should be entirely free not to participate.

That is not religious coercion. It is religious freedom.

We call for reconsideration of CAFMPI 03/26

The Anglican Catholic Church of Canada therefore calls upon the Canadian Armed Forces and the Government of Canada to reconsider CAFMPI 03/26 and to engage in substantive consultation with the Canadian military chaplaincy and Canada's religious communities.

We particularly urge that:

1. **The prohibition on religious language and references to God in public chaplaincy be withdrawn.**
2. **Chaplains be permitted to pray authentically according to their religious tradition when prayer is requested**, while ensuring that no military member is compelled to participate in or affirm a religious belief contrary to his or her conscience.
3. **Religious neutrality be understood as equal respect for religious belief and non-belief**, rather than as the exclusion of religious expression from public military occasions.
4. **The Canadian Armed Forces engage in genuine dialogue with its chaplains and the religious communities they represent** before implementing further changes to the nature and practice of military chaplaincy.
5. **The Charter rights of both religious and non-religious CAF members be protected**, including freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief, opinion and expression.

We note with regret the Military Ordinary's observation that attempts by religious and spiritual leaders to obtain substantive dialogue with responsible military and political authorities were repeatedly unsuccessful.

We strongly encourage the Government of Canada and the Canadian Armed Forces to correct this failure of consultation.

Our Anglican Catholic chaplains

The Anglican Catholic Church of Canada is proud of the priests who serve, or have served, the members of the Canadian Armed Forces as chaplains.

They serve not merely as providers of generalized “spiritual well-being,” but as priests of the Church: proclaiming the Gospel, offering the Holy Sacraments, hearing confessions, comforting the afflicted, ministering to families, burying the dead, and praying for those entrusted to their pastoral care.

We will continue to support our chaplains in their vocation and to defend the freedom of the members whom they serve.

We believe that a Canadian Armed Forces chaplain should never have to choose between obeying a military instruction and faithfully exercising the religious ministry to which he or she has been called.

The answer to diversity is not silence.

The answer to neutrality is not censorship.

The answer to religious freedom is not freedom from religion.

The answer is **freedom for people of faith and people of no faith to live and speak according to conscience, while extending the same freedom and respect to others.**

We therefore call upon the Canadian Armed Forces to reconsider Military Personnel Instructions 03/26, to restore authentic religious expression to military chaplaincy, and to enter into respectful and substantive dialogue with the religious and spiritual communities whose ministers serve Canada's military personnel.

We join the Catholic Military Ordinariate in calling for a fair and reasonable resolution of this matter, and we pray for the members of the Canadian Armed Forces, for our chaplains, and for Canada's military and political leaders.

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