



# RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

USAG Fort Polk, LA

GARRISON CHAPEL  
FY 19 Report and Analysis

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“War has fostered religion, and religion war.”<sup>1</sup>

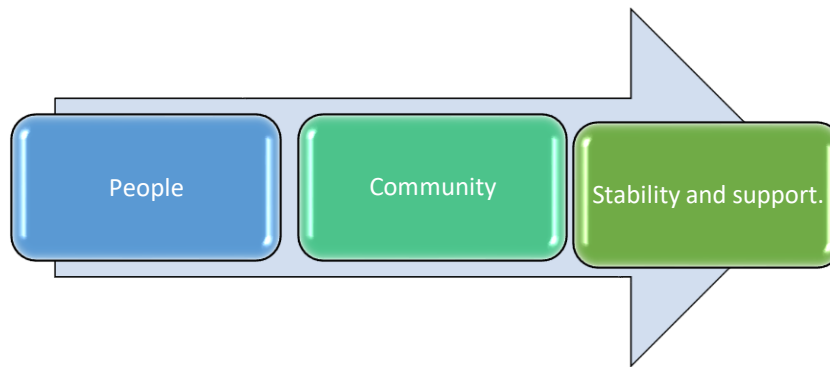
This report accounts for the Religious Education efforts of the US Army Garrison Religious Support Office (RSO) at Fort Polk, Louisiana from 01 October 2018-01 October 2019. Religious Education is the formative process integral to building and stabilizing character and a key component of the free exercise of religion. Within the military context RE is essential to prepare the heart and soul for the rigors of training, deployment, combat and reintegration for the military soldier and family members.

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<sup>1</sup> Thick, Edward. *War and the Soul*. Quest Books, Theosophical Publishing House, 2005

## Fort Polk Religious Education Report FY 19

Religious Education (RE) serves as a means of readiness, and quality of life within the military community. RE is an ever-evolving mission providing faith formation programs, opportunities, and environments that foster introspection and connection. RE cultivates faith-based community targeting the promotion of social and emotional adaptability.



RE is evolving within the military culture from the confines of formal church requirements to the introspective development of moral fortitude required to handle the realities of war. War is the business of the US Army, that is a reality. The aspects of war are what we prepare soldiers and family members to deal with.

### Fort Polk RE Attendee Demographic

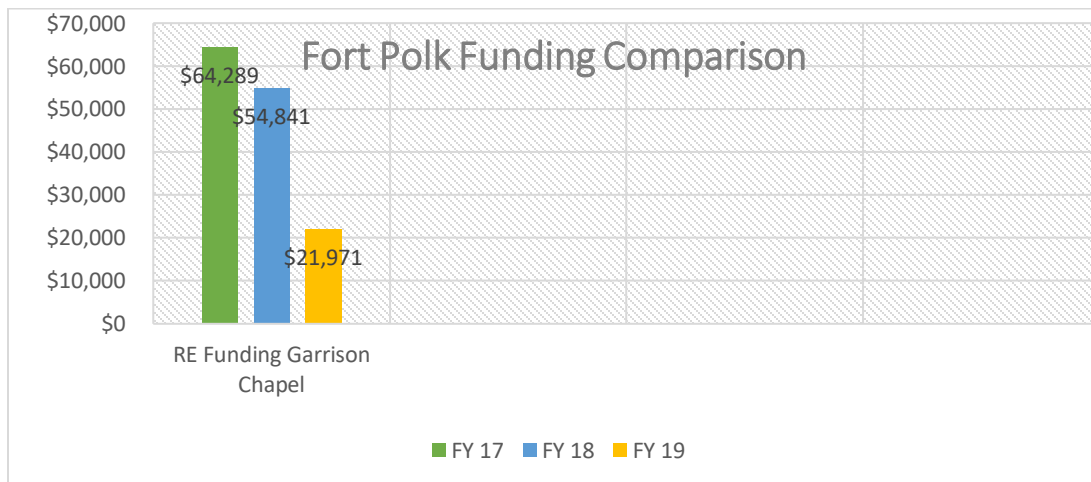
The Fort Polk RE programs primarily serve dependents of service members due largely to the unique mission of Fort Polk, and JRTC. The 2018 US Military demographic reporting reflects that 51% of the US Active duty force is married, and 40% of the total force have children, averaging two per home<sup>2</sup>. The average attendee at a Fort Polk RE program is a spouse in her mid to late twenties, and her two children. This is reflective of the demographic report. The second most prevalent attendee is a school age child between PRE-K and 6<sup>th</sup> grade. If we are to understand the family as a unit it is reasonable to assert that the distinct challenges of military life have the potential to affect each member adversely, and the family as a whole. It is with this

<sup>2</sup> Department of Defense, *2018 Demographics Profile of the Military Community*. Office of the Deputy Assistant Defense for Military Communities.2018

understanding that we pursue the interpersonal and spiritual development offered within the realm of Religious Education creating a bridge from spiritual formation to stability.

### Fort Polk RE Program Funding and Cost Analysis

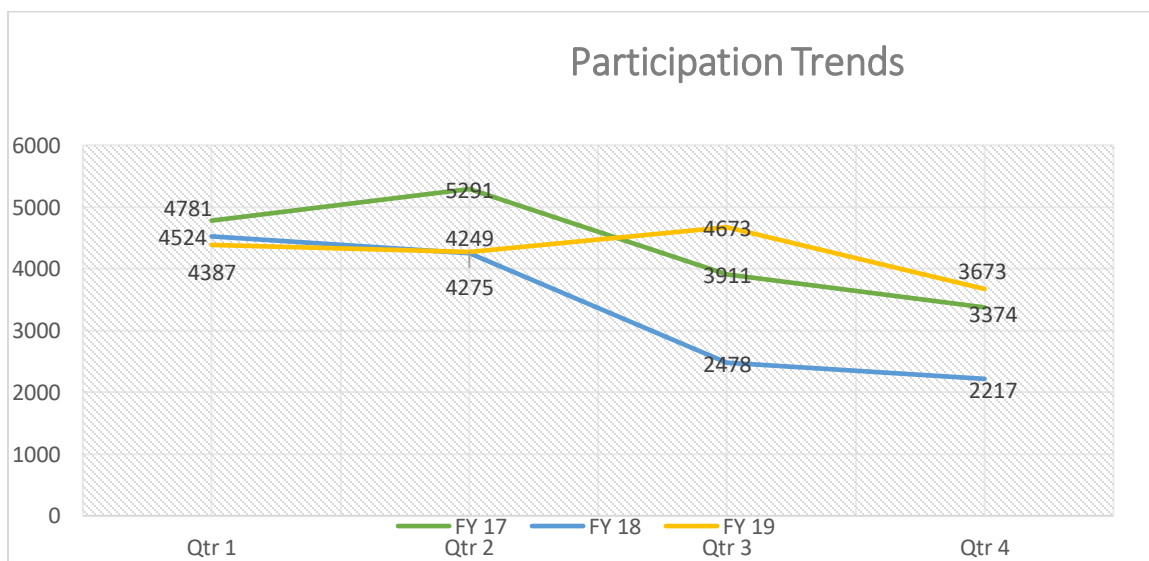
During the FY 19 the Fort Polk RE team served 13,937 participants across 490 events. Data records indicate that \$3,381 dollars of appropriated funds (AF) were utilized, and \$ 18,140 dollars of non-appropriated funds (NAF) were utilized. This yields an AF average of .24cents, per participant, and \$4.28 per hour. Use of AF funds is approved to support RE per AR 165-1, (14-3 section a, page 27). Mission essential funding for RE is largely related to the purchase of curriculum. Due to AF funding challenges in FY 19 curriculum purchases were severely limited. Non-appropriated funds averaged \$1.30 per participant; this does not include the NAF funds utilized for watch care expenses in support of childcare during RE programs. The total annual expense for RE programs at Fort Polk for FY 19 combining the AF/NAF funding source was \$21,971, averaging \$ 53.71 per event. Historical data from FY 18 and FY 17 indicate that FY 19 RE operated with less than half the financial resources from previous years.



While the financial data is encouraging and reflects stewardship, it is prudent to recognize that a funding need is present for FY 20 to revitalize, and sustain programs ensuring quality. Understanding the quality of life aspects of RE further begs the discussion of RE programing cost compared to other Army agencies like Morale Welfare Recreation (MWR) and Army Community Services (ACS).

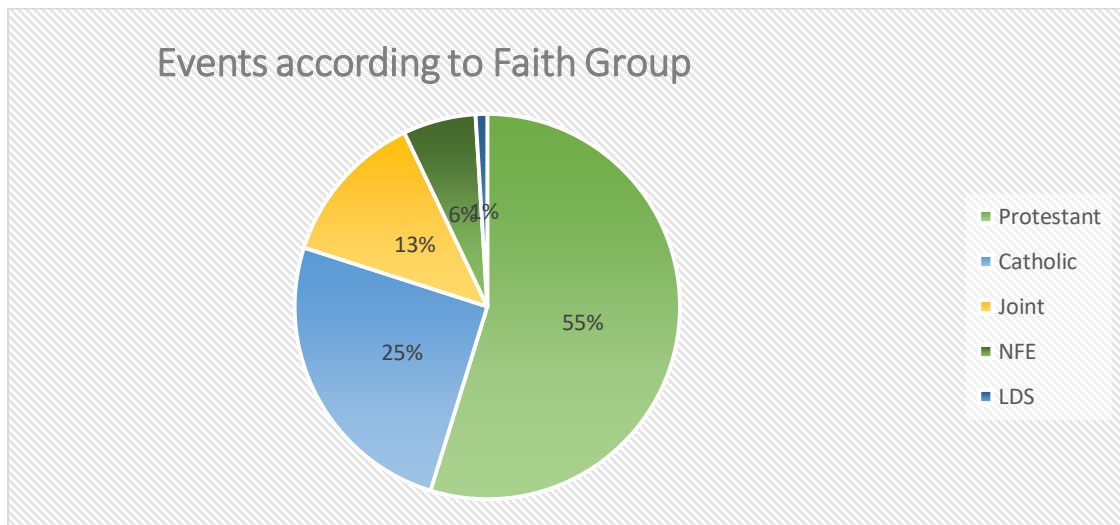
### Participation Trends

Of the 13,937 participants recorded attending RE events Quarter 3, FY 19 yielded the highest attendance of the year, accounting for 4,673 participants, and the month of May yielded the most highly attended programs (30 events). Consistently attendance was lower between FY 18 QTR 2 and FY 19, QTR 2 due to limited program space, as the Garrison Chapel was under renovation. This renovation not only displaced several programs but limited the capacity of participants based on a facility 70% smaller than the Garrison Chapel. Although the chapel renovations provided unique challenges for programs, it also offered innovative solutions, one such solution that developed was care group cells from Protestant Women of the Chapel (PWOC). Traditional small group space was not available during the displacement, however an effort to maintain the integrity of the program was vital. This bore the development of home care groups within PWOC. This model was organic, and so well liked that PWOC decided to maintain home care groups after returning to Main Post Chapel. Currently **A** (alpha) group meets at Main Post Chapel twice a month, and alternates with **B** (bravo) group. When a group is not meeting at MPC, they are meeting at home care groups, and vice versa. PWOC is averaging an attendance of 110 ladies per week across Fort Polk. We have found these groups promote accountability, mentorship, growth, and help displaced spouses connect to other women as they would within the familial setting. Spiritually, socially and emotionally the adoption of home care groups has been invaluable. Deployment cycles affected attendance during FY 19, as they did in previous years. Lower attendance in QTR 3, correlated with a rotation departing for a deployment. Typically, during the weeks prior to a deployment family time is more guarded, and the days and weeks immediately after the spouse departs are spent adjusting. This pattern is echoed during the FY 18 & FY 17 deployment cycle.



## Events

During FY 19 a total of 790 events were coordinated through the efforts of the RE team and volunteers at Main Post Chapel (MPC). These events produced a total of 789 education hours. Divided by faith group, the Protestant community conducted the most events, followed by the Catholic community events. Data suggesting that 55% of the events were Protestant is reflective of the predominately protestant assigned personnel. The number of events within the Protestant community was up by 14% (FY 18 yielded 41%), and the Catholic community was up by 7% (FY 18 yielded 18%). Both increases are significant and occurred after returning to Main Post Chapel after the renovations as space allowed growth. The chart below compares event activity by faith group.

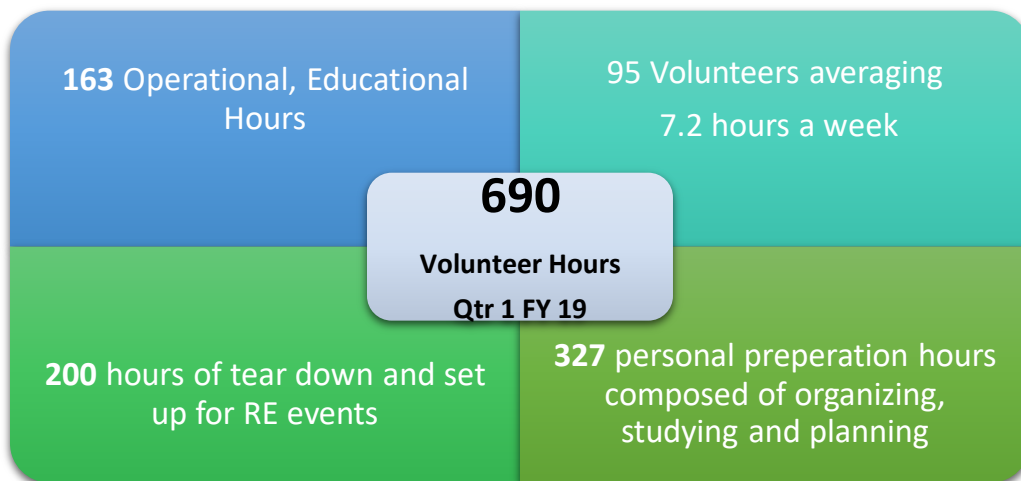


Unique ecumenical events and experiences during FY 19 included L.E.G.O Chapel camp, and the S.A.F.E. Women's Conference. L.E.G.O. Chapel Camp is a custom designed curriculum set offering biblically based solutions to prevalent issues unique to military children. A well-known pop-culture spiritual marker was exploited ensuring that children would see it again, and hopefully connect it with their faith system. Of additional interest are efforts made with the older generation of military teens participating in the real-world scenarios played out in the skit, as they ministered to the younger generation of military kids attending L.E.G.O. Camp. Family engagement efforts were made by including parent participation in memory verses, a site build, and take-home cards prompting faith-based discussions at home. Students who memorized verses were rewarded with Lego bricks to add to site build, and if parents recited verses, they earned extra Lego bricks. The result was a two-foot-tall cross made of Lego bricks, representing all the memory verses and families worked on during the week.

The S.A.F.E. women’s conference was a one-day event devoted to empowering women with military unique resources like ACS, MWR, and the Family Advocacy Program. Representatives were available to answer questions, and a Chaplain came to discuss the importance and value of the Armor of God. To assist preparing the ladies for encounters a local faith-based Jujitsu instructor came and lead the group in simple self-defense techniques. This comprehensive RE event deliberately focused on connecting women through a faith-based discussion, empowering them with resources, and equipping them with the ability to respond. The conference was also held in honor of Domestic Abuse and Prevention Month.

### Volunteer Work Force

RE events and programing at Fort Polk are sustained through the efforts of two contractors, and a Director of Religious Education (DRE) who manage a large volunteer force. During the FY 19 year 490 volunteers staffed, coordinated, taught, lead, and assisted the RE team in producing high quality RE. RE volunteers are a manpower asset, and for most volunteers this is also an expression of their personal faith and belief system. The efforts of the volunteer team produced 789 educational hours, what was not accounted for is the incredible amount of time prepping and cleaning up events. During FY 19 the RE team began collecting that data, and it was revealing. During Qtr. 1,1,163 operational /educational hours occurred. To prepare for those operational hours to happen, volunteers spent 327 hours preparing, and 200 hours working to clean up after events. There were 95 volunteers, meaning that each one worked an equivalent of 7.2 hours a week in support of the programs.



Various methods were used to attempt to catalog this information during the year, the challenge is that many volunteers will not report hours if they volunteer within a faith-based environment. The DRE is currently recording and analyzing this

information for FY20 utilizing a per event tracking form. Volunteer recognition effort from within the Army systems at ACS increased during FY19, as 65 volunteers exhibiting excellence and leadership were recognized for their work at the chapel during the quarterly Commanding General awards banquet. This not only provided a forum for us to formally recognize and validate the hard work and contributions of volunteers but also allowed the RE team a public forum for the activities that they produce. In addition to this forum, social media assets were updated monthly with the achievements of volunteer work within Religious Education.

### **Conclusion**

Fort Polk Religious Education for FY 19 efforts were steady, maintaining the previous years participation even under the challenges of funding, space, and the deployment cycle. This year of displacement followed by intentional efforts to rebuild required adaptability and innovation. Evaluation and analysis of RE efforts is an integral part to building the systems unique to the Fort Polk community that deliver quality RE. Recognition of volunteers as individuals is imperative to cultivating a culture of gratitude and teamwork. The RSO and RE team is deeply committed to building a bridge for the families and service members of Fort Polk to connect, empower and develop the moral fortitude to stand the test of the military with the security of their faith intact.