Educating for Spiritual Readiness

Dr. Grace C. Yeuell

Religious Education Program Director – IMCOM-Europe

Army communities are functioning in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environment exacerbated by prolonged COVID-19 recovery, growing global tensions, and social and political unrest across the country. These are particularly challenging times. As always, in times such as these, Army leaders of all ranks, and their Families, are called to hold firm as spiritually resilient people and ready communities. Army Field Manual (FM) 7-22 defines "spiritual" and "spiritual readiness" as follows.

> **Spiritual**: Concerned with an individual's core religious, philosophical, or human values that form that individual's sense of identity, purpose, motivation, character, and integrity. These elements enable one to build inner strength, make meaning of experiences, behave ethically, persevere through challenges, and be resilient when faced with adversity.[i]
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> **Spiritual Readiness**: The development of the personal qualities needed to sustain a person in times of stress, hardship, and tragedy. These qualities come from religious, philosophical, or human values and form the basis for character, disposition, decision making, and integrity.[ii]

This article identifies the Chaplain Corps' educative role in promoting spiritual readiness as defined above. It also explores and recommends for use by Chaplains, Religious Affairs Specialists and Directors of Religious Education three approaches to education that foster spiritual readiness through differing forms of engagement with religious, philosophical, moral and ethical resources.

The Chaplain Corps' Educative Responsibilities

The Chaplain Corps has overlapping responsibilities to provide moral/ethical leadership training and education (MLT), and religious education for the Army.[iii] Both educational domains play a key role in developing spiritually ready Army leaders, Family members, and military communities. A quick review of Army doctrine points to the intersection between both domains and identifies religious education as a critical through-line to spiritual readiness. Department of the Army Pamphlet (DA PAM) 165-19, "Moral Leadership," identifies the value of education in religious topics at both the Operational and Self-Development level. Examples of Operational training topics from the pamphlet include: 1) Discussion of how spiritual fitness and religious-spiritual formation serve as a basis for character and moral behavior, 2) Moral dimensions underlying respect and accommodation for diverse forms of religious exercise and belief in the workplace, informed by policy on religious accommodation, and 3) The history of the religious, philosophical, and military heritage reflected in the Army ethic and its underlying framework documents such as the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution/Bill of Rights.[iv] Self-development level training for moral leadership "includes planned and goal-oriented learning that reinforces and expands an individual's spiritual, religious, and philosophical knowledge base and self-awareness on moral-ethical matters."[v] Training in religious topics (religious education) is clearly a part of MLT and contributes to the production of more moral and ethical leaders for the Army.

Army Regulation (AR) 165-1, "Chaplain Corps Activities," then describes how religious education contributes to the resiliency of those leaders. It defines religious education as "…a formative process that plays an integral part in stabilizing character, heart, and soul

during the rigors of deployment, combat, reintegration, and other life cycle challenges associated with military services."[vi] Religious education's ability to foster adaptive responses such as character, heart and soul stabilization is echoed in Army Field Manual (FM) 7-22's "Introduction to Spiritual Readiness." FM 7-22 identifies belief (values)-based education (religious education) as one of the spiritual readiness practices that "define the essence of a person, enable one to build inner strength, make meaning of experiences, behave ethically, persevere through challenges, and be resilient when faced with adversity."[vii]

From being, to knowing, to doing, here is a doctrine-based summary of how religious education processes function as a critical through-line to Army leadership readiness.

Through the study of religious/moral/ethical literature and the life of faith in practice, religious education in its diverse expressions…		
Action	**Goal**	**Leadership Outcome**
Explores basic questions of identity, meaning, purpose, and value	Becoming and being whole, integrated persons	Leaders of character who exemplify values such as loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage
Guides participants in identifying and coming to know "the good"[viii]	Living moral and ethical lives	Principled leaders who combine their knowledge of people, concepts, and equipment to work for the common good and the fulfillment of the mission
Challenges participants to do what is right for self and others	Leading a more resilient and ready Force	Influential leaders who advance the mission by developing subordinates, building teams and fostering learning

In particular, three adaptable approaches from the field of religious education, Shared Praxis, Story-linking, and Heart Memory foster spiritual readiness as described above by encouraging leaders to address challenging issues and develop themselves as principled and influential leaders of character. Following is an overview of these three approaches. Each in its own way offers a fresh way forward in Chaplain Corps-led education for spiritual readiness.

Shared Praxis

Shared Praxis has great potential for creating the types of leadership outcomes charted above. This approach to religious education is the brainchild of Thomas H. Groome, Boston College Professor of Theology and Religious Education. Groome grounds Shared Praxis in a biblical study of the reign of God. For Groome, "Promoting this ultimate purpose of God's rule in people's lives calls up the more immediate and interrelated pedagogical tasks of educating, by God's grace, for lived Christian faith and for the wholeness of human freedom that is fullness of life for all."[ix] The approach is also informed by Groome's textual dialog with the Western philosophical tradition, including the epistemological works of Plato, Aquinas, Descartes, and Heidegger, among others. Of particular interest to Groome is Heidegger's study of consciousness as articulated in *Being and Time*. According to Groome, Heidegger's *Being and Time*

> set out to investigate the most foundational aspects of our 'being' as they present themselves to consciousness. By uncovering the existential structures and moods of 'being' that shape our consciousness, we will also know how and what we know.[x]

Groome identifies Heidegger's attempt to "reunite epistemology with ontology, knowing with 'being,' making the latter primary"[xi] as a "significant aspect of what I intend by praxis."[xii] Groome's goal for participants in Shared Praxis is lived *"Conation"* (Wisdom). Wisdom is evoked in the lives of participants through a "remembrance of being."[xiii] For Groome, religious education processes and pedagogies that enable remembrance of being,

> must engage the whole 'being' of participants as agents-subjects in relationship, enable them to bring to mind the consciousness that arises from their "being" with others in the world and to discern how they are both shaped by and are to be responsible shapers of their place and time together.[xiv]

An outline of the approach follows with the addition of example questions that propel leaders and participants from one movement to the next. Within the outline are indications of how/where this Christian religious education approach is adaptable for use in multi-religious as well as spiritual and non-religious contexts such as Army MLT.

MOVEMENT	GROOME	DRIVING QUESTIONS
1	Naming/Expressing Present Praxis	What is the issue to be addressed? What do we already know about this issue?
2	Critical Reflection on Present Action	Why do we know what we know about this issue? From where does our knowledge come?
3	Making Accessible "Christian" Story & Vision	What do religious or moral/ethical writings have to say about this issue?
4	Dialectical Hermeneutic to Appropriate "Christian" Story/Vision to Participant's Stories & Visions	Where does religion or morality/ethics support our prior knowing and where does it challenge what we thought we knew? How can we bring these two things together to create meaning today?
5	Decision/Response for Lived "Christian" Faith	How can we take what we have learned and use it to live more faithfully into the future?

Note that wherever the word "Christian" appears, a Jewish Chaplain could make accessible the elements of the Jewish story/vision, and likewise a Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu Chaplain, etc. Where the word "Christian" appears a Chaplain Corps leader could also draw from the Army's story/vision, including its religious, philosophical, and military heritage reflected in the Army ethic, to set the stage for critical reflection before making the movement towards individual and/or shared response for living. In this approach the process, following the Movements from 1 through 5, is as critical as the content presented in Movement 3. This order is designed to guide participants deeper into a remembrance of their being which will make them more knowledgeable and responsible shapers of their place and time in relationship to a particular issue.

The Army Chaplain Corps could educate for spiritual readiness by training and deploying the Shared Praxis approach and question-driven movements within a Chaplain Corps-sponsored "Living Well" program for Army leaders of all ranks together or by echelon. Living Well's curriculum of training classes could cover topics such as Basis for a Life Worth Living, My Body/My Choice, Interpersonal Relationships, Social Responsibility, Roots of Happiness, and Dying Well. To launch a new effort like this would require the development of a curriculum to follow and course materials that reflect the contemporary issues and concerns of life within a military context. These new course materials, utilizing the Shared Praxis approach, could be written and formatted for each topic with the same lesson plan of activities and questions for Movements 1, 2, 4, and 5. For Movement 3 within each plan the lesson would provide multiple options from which a Chaplain could choose based on the Chaplain's religious affiliation or desire to focus the class on moral and ethical resources in pursuit of wisdom.

Story-Linking

Story-linking is another approach from the field of religious education with potential to positively influence Army leadership outcomes as highlighted in the religious education processes chart above. Dr. Anne E. Streaty Wimberly, Professor Emerita of Christian Education at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, GA recommends Story-linking as a culturally sensitive process that gives voice to the stories of marginalized people and communities. Wimberly's sources for Story-Linking include the freedom stories, counter freedom stories and declaration stories of the Hebrew Bible, the salvation story of the Christian New Testament, Story-Linking processes recorded in historic African American slave communities and works of religious educators such as Thomas Groome and Peter Gilmour.   Like Groome, Wimberly's goal for participants in Story-Linking is wisdom. However, her understanding of wisdom focuses on wisdom's liberating qualities for people and communities. For Wimberly, liberating wisdom "allows freedom to doubt, question, lament life's realities, and to unlearn and relearn meanings of faith throughout life."[xv] Similar to Groome's understanding of the final step in his process, Wimberly's liberating wisdom ultimately allows participants to engage more freely and effectively in ethical decision-making and action.

Wimberly introduces Story-Linking by highlighting its empowering and liberative role in historically oppressed African American religious communities. She also highlights the rich heritage of storytelling brought from Africa and sustained throughout years of slavery in America. Her emphasis on the power of stories and storytelling connects her to religious educator, Peter Gilmour's, assertion that our stories are the "sacred texts"[xvi] of our lives. This narrative way of coming to know, by connecting the sacred texts of

our lives with the sacred texts of our religious communities, is her pedagogy for liberating wisdom. Wimberly notes, "Through remembering the sacred texts of our lives, we come in contact with the wisdom inherent in them and with the Holy One, the source of hope and healing."[xvii]

Wimberly is interested in developing wisdom as a critical response to "the increasing fervent cry of persons for wisdom in what is being termed a nihilistic age where wisdom somehow seems in short supply."[xviii] She emphasizes the value of facilitating cohort group Story-linking grounded in the life stories of marginalized individuals as well as intergenerational group Story-linking of family stories as they relate to the marginalized experience of the larger community. Wimberly notes, "There is a need for immediate or 'up-close' families and the extended "village" family to embrace, model, and convey meanings of rootlessness, lovelessness, hopelessness, and spiritual impoverishment."[xix] Including family Story-linking along with cohort group Story-linking as a Chaplain Corps programmatic option is a helpful reminder that many Army leaders in search of wisdom serve with their Families standing alongside.

Story-Linking is divided into four distinct phases as noted below. With each phase participants move from a starting point of personal, social and/or political marginalization, through stories of empowerment, towards a hope-filled vision for the future and commitment to positive action.

- Phase 1: Engaging the Everyday Story
- Phase 2: Engaging the Christian Faith Story in the Bible
- Phase 3: Engaging Christian Faith Stories from the African American Heritage
- Phase 4: Engaging in Christian Ethical Decision-making

According to Wimberly, the key to Story-Linking's success is the leader's ability to create educational environments in which participants "are given voice and can enter into dialogue together in open, caring, and supportive ways."[xx] She describes this environment as *inliving*, an environment where leaders and participants, "…dare to hear others, to enter into the experience of others, to feel with others their concerns and sufferings, and to envision and anticipate with others ways of confronting their concerns and sufferings."[xxi] Wimberly admits that creating this kind of environment requires trained leaders to model "compassionate listening"[xxii] and receptiveness to the stories of others. To aide potential leaders her text offers concrete guidance on how to facilitate educational group processes that offer a welcoming presence to participants, invite interpersonal connection, and attend to the developmental stages of small group process.

Story-Linking's roots lie deep in African American Christian practice, but this educative process could be adapted for use by and/or with participants from other historically marginalized groups within the Army community.   Depending on the Chaplain and/or the group the Christian emphasis could also be translated into stories shared within other religious communities or into stories shared within the Army's storied past. For example, a Jewish Chaplain could invite Jewish Soldiers into a Story-linking group where those Soldiers could share their everyday stories of marginalization, then engage with stories of strength and courage from the Hebrew Scriptures, followed by engagement with similar stories from more contemporary Jewish history, towards the goal of increased wisdom for daily living in today's Army. Likewise, other low-density groups within the Army could be gathered into Story-linking groups to share their stories

of marginalization, engage with "sacred texts" such as the Soldier's Creed or the Army values, followed by engagement with stories from military history that feature similar individuals or groups exemplifying related Army values, towards the goal of ethically responsive and empowered decision-making.   In these times of social and political unrest across the country, offering opportunities for marginalized peoples or low density groups to gather and engage in the educative process of Story-Linking would provide needed "strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow."[xxiii]

The Chaplain Corps could leverage the benefits of Story-Linking to combat some of the political and social stressors unsettling the ranks, including issues related to culture, gender, race, and sexual orientation. Story-linking is a tested approach that complements current initiatives such as the Army's "Project Inclusion."[xxiv] Offering congregational and/or unit-based Story-linking opportunities, sensitive to the Army's ranked structure, would also complement the ongoing goals of the Army People Strategy[xxv] to build more diverse and cohesive teams of Army leaders.

Heart Memory

Heart Memory is an approach from the field of religious education that undergirds both Shared Praxis and Story-linking as a driver for positive leadership outcomes. For this article Heart Memory draws its name from the biblical psalmist's proclamation, "I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you." (Psalm 119:11)[xxvi] The psalmist's words remind readers that knowing deeply is the beginning of moral and ethical decision-making. They also remind readers that people, like Army leaders, cannot become good (Be), commit to the good (Know), and lead from a position of goodness (Do) if they have not first taken to heart that which is good.

Heart Memory processes surround people with verbal, visual, and auditory repetitions of up-building stories and words, songs, chants, mantras, etc. These spoken, seen, heard, and experienced repetitions then become a source for meaning-making and positive action. In an article on "brain matters" religious educator David Hogue notes this important fact about repetition's role in achieving heart-level memory.

> For decades scientists have understood that learning and memory are the result of strengthening synaptic connections between neurons. When neurons repeatedly or forcefully communicate with each other, they increase the odds that they will fire again. That is, some chemical or physical change in the two cells that are communicating with each other occurs so that firing the first neuron is more likely to fire the second the next time around. This discovery, made by Donald Hebb in the 1940s came to be summarized as "neurons that fire together wire together" (Hebb 1949).[xxvii]

History shows that engaging in educative processes for Heart Memory has fortified countless hearts against the hardships of military life and leadership. Some of the most impassioned witnesses to the power of Heart Memory are Army veterans. From Civil War Soldiers who suffered and survived "Soldier's Heart" to Vietnam Prisoners of War who lived to tell their stories of brutal captivity and prolonged isolation, Heart Memory played a key role in their ability to persevere. A recent article from a local newspaper entitled, "POW Saved by His Memories of Scripture, Church" tells the story of Army Veteran, Howard Rutledge, who declared that "Scripture and hymns might be boring to some, but it was the way we conquered our enemy and overcame the power of death around us."[xxviii]

The Chaplain Corps could target Heart Memory as a vital precursor to the other educational approaches described above. Both Shared Praxis and Story-linking profit when participants can bring core knowledge to heart and mind. Depending on the

leaders, the participants, and the context, that core knowledge could range from the twenty-third Psalm to the Soldier's Creed. The Chaplain Corps' Heart Memory challenge is to begin thinking strategically and planning long range to ensure that some standard, some foundational curriculum,[xxix] for resilience and readiness-building Heart Memory exists and persists.

Religious Education for Spiritual Readiness

As the Chaplain Corps moves forward to meet the challenges of spiritual readiness, it is important to keep religious education approaches and processes in mind. Religious education based Shared Praxis, Story-linking, and Heart Memory each offer a fresh response to current issues. As noted, Shared Praxis is an educative way ahead for reinforcing the value of a life worth living and attacking the corrosive factors currently plaguing the Force. Story-linking is a way ahead for tackling numerous diversity issues currently dividing the Army community. Heart Memory is a foundational way to hardwire fortifying personal, family, and communal values for later access and application. These are revitalizing educational processes worth pursuing in both the short and long term.

Identifying the doctrinal links between MLT and Army religious education is an important starting point. Seeing these two domains as complementary creates the potential for gained efficiencies and increased Chaplain Corps effectiveness. Developing targeted curricula and resources using Shared Praxis, Story-linking, and Heart Memory approaches will promote moral/ethical/wise Army leadership and advance the spiritual readiness mission of the Army.

ⁱ Field Manual (FM) 7-22.10-2., "Holistic Health and Fitness," October 8, 2020.

ⁱⁱ FM 7-22.10-1.

ⁱⁱⁱ Army Regulation (AR) 165-1. 2-3.a. and 9-10.b., "Army Chaplain Corps Activities," June 23, 2015.

^{iv} Department of the Army Pamphlet (DA PAM) 165-19.4-5.c. (3), (4), and (8), "Moral Leadership," 27 November 2020.

^v DA PAM 165-19.4-7.

^{vi} AR 165-1.5-2.

^{vii} FM 7-22.10-2.

^{viii} Reference to Plato's form/idea of the good as happiness (eudemonia) attained through the pursuit of particular virtues.

^{ix} Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education & Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 14.

^x Groome, 76.

^{xi} Groome, 78.

^{xii} Ibid.

^{xiii} Groome, 34.

^{xiv} Ibid.

^{xv} Anne E. Streaty Wimberly, *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education: Revised Edition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 13.

^{xvi} Wimberly, 4.

^{xvii} Ibid.

^{xviii} Wimberly, xiii.

xix Wimberly, xiv.

xx Wimberly, 35.

xxi Ibid.

xxii Ibid.

xxiii Thomas Obediah Chisholm, "Great Is Thy Faithfulness," (No.276) in *The Presbyterian Hymnal: Hymns, Psalms, and Spiritual Songs* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990).

xxiv Wardynski, E. Casey, "Army People Strategy: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Annex," 1 September 2020.

xxv McConville, James C., Ryan D. McCarthy, and Michael A. Grinston, "The Army People Strategy," October 2019.

xxvi *The Discipleship Study Bible, New Revised Standard Version*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008.

xxvii David A. Hogue, "Brain Matters: Practicing Religion, Forming the Faithful," *Religious Education* 107, no.4 (August 2012): 341, https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2012.699391.

xxviii Jan White, "POW saved by his memories of scripture, church," The Andalusia Star-News, May 12, 2021, https://www.andalusiastarnews.com/2011/11/12/pow-saved-by-his-memories-of-scripture-church/

xxix The word curriculum comes from the Latin word "*Currere*" which originally meant to run/to proceed/to follow a course. The curriculum is the course of activities and experiences that children go through as they grow into mature adults. Curriculum resources such as study guides and lesson plans provide support and direction over the course of the curriculum.