

Military Chaplain

The United States Army, Navy and Air Force have a corps of chaplains who provide chaplaincy ministry. These chaplains and staff officers serve on active duty or in a capacity as a Reserve or Guard chaplain. This area also includes the volunteer chaplains of the Civil Air Patrol, an Air Force auxiliary service and Auxiliary Clergy Support of the Coast Guard. Additionally, some states may have a militia or State Defense Force.

Below are the general requirements for Armed Services Chaplaincy. Please consult the specific chaplain branch recruiter for the latest military requirements.

One of the mandatory requirements for Military Chaplaincy endorsement is Professional Ministry Experience (PME). The PME for each Branch and component is described below.

[U.S. Army Chaplain Requirements \(Active Duty, Army Reserve, and Army Guard\)](#)

- Ordained minister of or recognized by a Southern Baptist Convention Church
- Valid SBC endorsement
- Undergraduate degree of 120 semester hours from an accredited institution
- Master of Divinity/Theology degree of at least 72 hours from an accredited institution
- United States citizenship (Permanent residents can apply for U.S. Army Reserve only.)
- Pass the National Agency Check for a security clearance
- Pass Armed Forces physical exam
- Two years pastoral experience within a congregational setting

[For U.S. Army Chaplain Candidate Program:](#)

- Be a full-time graduate student at an accredited seminary or theological school
- Be between 18-36 years of age at the time of commissioning
- Able to secure an endorsement
- Pass a military physical exam
- U.S. citizen or permanent resident
- Pass a national agency security clearance
- Ordination is not required

[U.S. Air Force Chaplain Requirements \(Active Duty, Reserve, and National Guard\)](#)

- Ordained Minister of or recognized by an SBC church
- Valid SBC endorsement
- Undergraduate degree of 120 semester hours from an accredited institution

- Master of Divinity/Theology degree of at least 72 hours from an accredited institution
- United States citizenship
- Pass the National Agency Check for a security clearance
- Pass Armed Forces physical exam
- Two years pastoral experience within a congregational setting

For U.S. Air Force Chaplain Candidate Program:

- Be a full-time graduate student at an accredited seminary or theological school
- Less than 35 years of age at the time of appointment
- Able to secure an endorsement
- Pass a military physical exam
- U.S. citizen or permanent resident
- Pass a national agency security clearance
- Ordination is not required

U.S. Navy Chaplain Requirements (Active Duty and Reserve)

- Ordained Minister of or recognized by an SBC church
- Valid SBC endorsement
- Undergraduate degree of 120 semester hours from an accredited institution
- Master of Divinity/Theology degree of at least 72 hours from an accredited institution
- United States citizenship
- Pass the National Agency Check for a security clearance
- Pass Armed Forces physical exam
- Pass a Navy physical fitness test
- Two years pastoral experience within a congregational setting

For U.S. Navy Chaplain Candidate Program:

- Be a full-time graduate student at an accredited seminary or theological school
- Be 21 years of age and be able to complete 20 years
- Able to secure an endorsement
- Pass a military physical exam
- U.S. citizen or permanent resident
- Pass a national agency security clearance
- Ordination is not required

Civil Air Patrol Chaplain Requirements

- Ordained minister of or recognized by an SBC church
- Valid SBC endorsement
- Undergraduate degree of 120 semester hours from an accredited institution

- Master of Divinity/Theology degree of at least 72 hours from an accredited institution (Clergy without accredited graduate degree may ask for a waiver providing they have a minimum of five years full-time pastoral experience)
- Two years pastoral experience within a congregation setting
- Meet CAP Senior Membership requirements
- A Fingerprint card and background check
- Pay CAP national and wing dues
- Contact your wing chaplain for an application (CAP Form 35)

[Coast Guard Auxiliary Clergy Support](#)

The Auxiliary Clergy Support program supplements and supports Navy chaplains serving with the Coast Guard by expanding Religious Ministry within the Coast Guard to better meet the needs of Coast Guard members and their families.

- Ordained Minister of or recognized by an SBC church
- Be a member of the Coast Guard Auxiliary
- Must meet many of the same qualifications as members of the Navy Chaplain Corps

Professional Ministry Experience (PME) Requirements

Military chaplaincy requires at least two years of “pastoral leadership in a congregational setting.” There are no professional ministry experience (PME) waivers. To assist you and the church you may be serving, the following ministry skills are the minimum of what the SBC Chaplains Commission consider valid PME over a two-year period in a local SBC church setting:

- Leading adults in an SBC church as a pastoral leader called by God to the Gospel ministry
- Overseeing the planning and leading of a worship service (at least 12 times)
- Crafting and delivering a sermon during a worship service (at least 24 times)
- Experience with providing adult counseling on various topics (e.g., marriage, career, finance, bereavement)
- Experience working with a family to plan and conduct a funeral service (at least 4 times)
- Experience working with a couple seeking marriage by providing premarital counseling and leading the marriage ceremony (at least 1 time)
- Leading a baptism service (at least 2 times)
- Leading and facilitating the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper (at least 2 times)

General Endorsement Requirements

When using vocational or volunteer chaplains, each institutional agency and organization sets specific requirements for their hiring criteria. In addition, the Southern Baptist Convention has its own denominational requirements for endorsing chaplains. All chaplains endorsed by the SBC must meet these minimum requirements:

- Demonstrate the call, competence and character for ministry as a chaplain.

¹ For specific details, see Chaplaincy Endorsement Manual, “Divorce and Remarriage,” 31.

- › The applicant must demonstrate a call to the ministry. This involves not only the written communication, but actions showing a personal commitment to Christian ministry.
- › The applicant must have proven character in line with his or her call to chaplain ministry. Chaplains are expected to live their personal and professional lives with the highest practice of integrity in accordance with the *NAMB Code of Conduct and Covenant of Support*. A chaplain's personal character must be consistent with the spiritual leadership required to work with people.
- › The applicant must undergo a background check that includes credit, criminal, and sexual offenses.
- Be a member in good standing with an SBC church for a minimum of one year. All endorsed chaplains are expected to maintain membership in a Southern Baptist church and develop an accountability relationship with a Southern Baptist church. This accountability should relate to the chaplain's personal life, as well as his or her exercise of ministry in his or her ministry context.
- Submit references, including one from applicant's SBC Pastor, ministerial staff, or Director of Missions/Associational Mission Strategist.
- For vocational chaplains, be licensed, commissioned, or ordained by an SBC church or church of like faith recognized by the applicant's current SBC church. This recognizes the role of the local church in affirming the ministry of the applicant.
- Hold theological beliefs currently adopted by the SBC as represented in [*The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*](#). Additionally, applicants and endorsed chaplains are to affirm compliance and support of the following policies:
 - › If divorced, the applicant will be assessed with grace and mercy on an individual basis in accordance with NAMB policy.¹
 - › The applicant must agree to the *NAMB Code of Conduct and Covenant of Support*.
- Vocational chaplains should have accredited theological training consistent with their projected ministry assignment. A Master of Divinity degree or equivalent is often required for vocational chaplains.
- Volunteer chaplains are expected to be actively engaged in chaplain-specific training.
- Meet requirements of employing agency, institution, or professional organization. The Chaplain Commission will not endorse a chaplain who does not meet the requirements of these agencies or organizations
- Must receive approval from the Chaplains Commission.

Duration of Endorsements

An SBC Chaplaincy endorsement is to a specific chaplain ministry position. Any change in chaplain status or employment requires an update of endorsement. Some ministerial training programs, such as a clinical pastoral education residency, have a specified duration. When the chaplain completes the training, the endorsement terminates. Certain endorsements have a specified time for which they are valid. This termination date is usually stated on the

¹ For specific details, see Chaplaincy Endorsement Manual, "Divorce and Remarriage," 31.

endorsement and/or is expressed by the institution's policy. If an endorsement is no longer required, the endorsement will terminate until an update is requested. A chaplain may request the withdrawal of endorsement at any time. A chaplain may lose his or her endorsement at any time due to circumstances such as doctrinal stance, moral failure, or other substantial issues.

All endorsements terminate when the chaplain is no longer affiliated with the organization to which he or she was endorsed and/or the chaplain no longer meets the SBC requirements for endorsement.

Endorsement Updates

Periodically, the institution will ask that the chaplain have an updated endorsement. It is the responsibility of the chaplain to initiate the process for updating an endorsement. Also, a chaplain should contact the SBC Chaplaincy Team to request an endorsement update when his or her status or ministry location changes. Endorsement update requests can be made through the chaplain's portal (mynamb.net).

Chaplains can have more than one endorsement if an individual is actively serving as a recognized chaplain in respective institutions.

Chaplains can request an update by contacting the SBC Chaplaincy Team or through the Chaplain portal at mynamb.net. Once started, the chaplain will need to complete an Endorsement Update Application and send proper supporting documents. When requesting an updated endorsement, chaplains are to ensure their current profile, SBC church membership, pastoral reference, and Quarterly Report is current. When a chaplain requests an update to a vocational endorsement from a volunteer endorsement, the basic requirements/guidelines for that chaplaincy category and status applies. Please allow up to six weeks for the endorsement update process to be completed.

Transferring an Endorsement

A chaplain can only be endorsed through one endorsing body. However, a chaplain can change ecclesiastical endorsement at any time for a variety of reasons.

Any transfer of endorsement to another religious ecclesiastical organization requires the chaplain to inform their current endorsing agent. The ecclesiastical endorsement process, requirements, and timeline differ among the various religious ecclesiastical organizations.

As a general rule, SBC Chaplaincy allows a 90-day transition period for transferring endorsements to another ecclesiastical body and will include either a with or without prejudice comment.

Oversight and Supervision

Chaplains typically serve in a secular institutional setting that authorize and hold them accountable. Chaplains are also sent to the field by faith groups that endorse them. A chaplain maintains his or her endorsement, and therefore employability, by staying in affiliation and good standing with his or her faith group. However, it is the secular institution that employs and authorizes chaplains as their religious leaders and official representatives.

The Chaplains Commission, through the administrative actions and pastoral care of the SBC Chaplaincy Team, retains ecclesiastical oversight of the chaplain's work and life as a representative of the SBC. The Chaplaincy Team members are available to respond to any questions or concerns.

Each applicant for denominational endorsement by the Chaplains Commission is expected to understand, accept, and support the Commission's policies and purposes.

Discipline and Withdrawal of an SBC Endorsement

An SBC-endorsed chaplain may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including withdrawal of endorsement when he or she violates a law (local, state, federal, including the Uniform Code of Military Justice), agency policy, SBC general expectations as stated in [*The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*](#), *NAMB Code of Conduct and Covenant of Support*, a personal or professional ethic that impacts his or her effectiveness, or is an embarrassment to the cause of Christ, Southern Baptists, NAMB, or sending SBC church.

The Chaplains Commission desires that justice, grace, and mercy be exercised in all situations for personal redemption and restoration. However, withdrawal of endorsement may result from any situation deemed by the Chaplains Commission to warrant such action.