

**THE PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED COMMISSION (PRCC)
ON CHAPLAINS AND MILITARY PERSONNEL
Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC)
Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC)
The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)
Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)
Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA)
and chaplaincy endorsing body for the
Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Ko-Shin) (KPCA)
United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA)**

To PRCC Member Denomination Stated Clerks, Presbytery Clerks, Sessions, and Members of PRCC Congregations

Among the constitutional responsibilities of the Presbyterian and Reformed Commission on Chaplains is “keeping member denominations informed of significant developments, trends, issues and problems concerning chaplains and members of the Armed Forces and other institutions ...”¹ This letter comes pursuant to that responsibility.

Many news media have reported the increasing and unprecedented number of sexual assaults on members of the military services, perpetrated by fellow service members, with parallel acknowledgments that widespread educational efforts to prevent this shameful state of affairs have failed. While this criminal activity is known to have occurred in almost all locations where military personnel are stationed, many of these assaults have taken place where women are assigned to remote locations, especially in combat areas of interest to U. S. forces.²

To underscore the importance of our concern, we are impelled to inform you that in the fiscal year ending in September 2011, 3,192 sexual assaults were reported; in the 2012 year 3,374; and in 2013, more than 5,000. In 2012 the Department of Defense, extrapolating from an all-service survey of 108,478 personnel, estimated that 26,000 active-duty personnel were victims of “unwanted sexual contact” (over 70 per day): 12,100 of the 203,000 women on active duty (ca. 6.1%) and 13,900 of the 1.2 million men on active duty (ca. 1.2%). Careful study of the Department of Defense Report reveals that the extrapolated number of male victims is 53% of the total number of victims. Victims in completed investigations of unrestricted reports in FY12 were 88% female and 12% male. Of “subjects” (alleged assailants), 90% were male, 2% female, and 8% of unidentified gender. Of the 26,000 incidents, 55% were rapes or aggravated sexual assaults and 6% were nonconsensual sodomy. The Veterans Administration has opened a unit in Florida to help male victims of military sexual assault.³

Both the problem and the military establishment’s response to it have been the subject of congressional hearings, press reports, and a presidential news conference. The 2014 National Defense Authorization Act requires dealing with the crisis, including additional training programs and changes in the military justice system. Whether these produce significant change in military culture remains to be seen. Thus far, educational efforts have been demonstrably ineffective. It also remains unclear how the military is to ensure the rights of the accused as well as victims in sexual assault cases.

The acknowledged overwhelming evidence of this ethical collapse is a painful and powerful reminder that personal moral integrity, especially in those in leadership positions, is crucial to maintaining combat readiness in our armed forces. These crimes are a threat to the spiritual and emotional well-being of service members as well. Maintaining a high standard of ethical conduct is much more difficult when a persistent, needless, and abnormal level of temptation has been introduced into any situation, which is precisely what occurred when the decision was made to include women in military combatant assignments.⁴

We respectfully remind you of the unanimous conclusions by three of our Presbyterian and Reformed denominations that "...biblical teaching does not give a nation warrant to employ women for military combat."⁵

The purpose of this communication is to assist you in pastoral counseling of members of your congregations who are in or considering military service. While our sons and daughters are to be commended for their desire to serve God in the uniformed services (Luke 3:14), we believe it is imperative to counsel them of the risks to both women and men in the current military culture: of the dangers of temptation, of being assaulted, and of being wrongfully accused. Until the Department of Defense changes this policy, the Church must be ready to counsel and support military members who find themselves in these tragic situations.

If this disastrous policy is not reversed, many churches will be constrained to counsel daughters and other women against seeking to serve in any of our military services and to provide full legal support for women in our churches in seeking conscientious objector status when the draft returns.

We respectfully request that Clerks of Synods, Stated Clerks, and Clerks of General Assemblies distribute this communication to subordinate courts and they in turn to pastors and sessions for their use in pastoral counseling of families and individuals.

Respectfully Submitted,



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Chairman of the PRCC

Notes:

¹ PRCC Constitution, Article II.

² In FY 2009, a total of 279 incidents of sexual assault were reported in combat areas of interest (CAI): 149 of those were in Iraq and 32 in Afghanistan. As US troops have been withdrawn from Iraq and have remained in larger numbers in Afghanistan, the proportion of sexual assault reports has reversed. In 2012 there were 23 in Iraq and 132 in Afghanistan. *Department of Defense, Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military*, 2 vols. (Fiscal Year 2012), I/84-87. Hereinafter *DoD 2012 Report*. In FY 2012 the number of assaults reported in CAIs was down to 239. Of the 212 Unrestricted Reports [i.e., the victim gave full information to military authorities], 23 (11 percent) were made in Iraq and 132 (62 percent) were made in Afghanistan. The remaining 57 were made in Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Djibouti, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Qatar, Egypt, Oman, and Saudi Arabia. Of "subjects" (accused assailants), 90% were male, 2% female, and 8% unidentified. In addition, 54 US service members were sexually assaulted by foreign nationals, of whom all 54 were males.

³ *DoD 2012 Report*, II/1-4. "Unwanted sexual contact" is defined as "intentional sexual contact that was against a person's will or which occurred when the person did not or could not consent, and includes completed or attempted sexual intercourse, sodomy (oral or anal sex), penetration by an object, and the unwanted touching of genitalia and other sexually-related areas of the body." *Ibid.*, 1. This category excludes gender-related inappropriate harassment (innuendo, sexist remarks, offensive jokes, etc.). In addition, the definition of "unwanted sexual contact" in the Uniform Code of Military Justice was amended in 2004, 2007, and 2012. I/63, fn 71. For more detail, see UCMJ Art. 120 ("Rape, sexual assault, and other sexual misconduct") and 125 (Sodomy), available online at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/granule/USCODE-2010-title10> (10 USC 47). *DoE 2012 Report I*, p. 81 and 83; "Trapped in Trauma," *Tampa Bay Times*, Aug 24, 2013.

⁴ This includes women who are attached to, but not assigned to, combat units, and women in close support of combat operations (e.g., interrogating female prisoners and civilians). Beginning in 2016, the DoD plans to begin assigning women as members of combat units.

⁵ RPCNA, *Min. 186th Synod*, 1998, p. 85-86; OPC 68th General Assembly, 2001, sec. 144 (accessed online 7 Jan 2014); PCA, 31st General Assembly, 2002, sec. 30-57 (accessed online 7 Jan 2014). Cf. PRCC *Chaplains' Manual* (2012 ed.), pp. 22-26. The discussion in the *Chaplains' Manual* is particularly useful.