

To the Armed Forces Chaplains Board
RE: Revision of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" Policy
May 2, 2010

Sirs,

As the Endorsing Agent for most of the Orthodox Chaplains for all US Military services, I have been asked to clarify the Orthodox position, which must be upheld by our Chaplains, on homosexuality, the "gay lifestyle," "gay marriage," and the conditions under which our chaplains may minister to individuals who espouse such positions. It is also important to state the conditions under which our chaplains may remain in the military if indeed there are important changes made in the military's attitude toward these activities.



The Orthodox Church unequivocally condemns homosexual activity between males or females, as it also condemns promiscuous activity and fornication between persons of the opposite sex, based on Holy Tradition, particularly the Holy Scriptures and the Church canons. Orthodox teaching is clear and firm, because such activity is not only sinful, but ultimately self-destructive. Those who engage in such activity are excluded by the Canons from the sacraments of the Church. A "gay" identity is not recognized or accepted by the Church Fathers, for it entails a complete submission of oneself to a sinful state of self-delusion. There is, however, repentance.

The Church categorically rejects homosexual relations as "marriage," no matter what ritual may be performed or by whom. Those who engage in such a partnership are cut off from the sacraments of the Church, until the relation is dissolved and the individuals involved complete a term of penance. Any priest who would dare perform such a "marriage" would be immediately defrocked by his own action. No Orthodox priest, military or civilian, may sanction or approve of such relations in any of his teachings, especially in any public setting; he would be subject to immediate suspension if he were to do so.

The main way an Orthodox priest might minister to someone who embraces a "gay" identity and engages in homosexual activity is to call him or her to repent, to change his or her lifestyle, to renounce the "gay identity" and to embrace a Christian lifestyle of chastity. The call to repentance is a call to healing, to forgiveness and to transformation. It is the core teaching of the Church for anyone caught in sin.

If our chaplains were in any way forced to minister the sacraments to those involved in such activity; or forced to teach that such behavior is either good or acceptable, or prohibited from denouncing such behavior as sinful and self-destructive, it would create an impediment to their service in the military. If such an attitude were regarded as "prejudice" or the denunciation of homosexuality as "hate language," or the like, we would be forced to pull out our chaplains from military service.

This issue is critical for our society. To validate homosexuality in the military would be a validation of it for much of American society. I believe that would profoundly demoralize the military and would contribute to the moral degradation and decadence

of our society. It would certainly demoralize the chaplains. The Orthodox Church firmly opposes the validation of homosexuality in any form.

We do, however, see the need to protect those individuals who struggle with their sexual identity. That problem is itself a result of the degradation of our social fabric. A very large segment of our American society shares the traditional and orthodox attitude toward homosexuality. Many soldiers are not tolerant of "gays." Those struggling with same-sex attraction need to be shielded from abuse from other soldiers, even as they are counseled appropriately to find a way out of their chosen identity. While not condoning their behavior, we need to be compassionate. The best way to be compassionate is to be honest by attempting to persuade them that their behavior is self-destructive, but that it can be forgiven and healed.

Thank you for receiving our participation in this vital discussion, which is critical to the future of our chaplaincy, our US Military, and our nation.

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+Jonah". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross symbol above the 'J'.

+Jonah

Archbishop of Washington

Metropolitan of All America and Canada

Endorsing Agent for Chaplains of the Orthodox Church in America