

Becoming a VA Chaplain Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

1. Who is my ecclesiastical endorser?

Each religious faith group that wishes to provide chaplains to the military and/or VA has designated a specific individual as their national endorser for this purpose. If you do not know who your endorser is, please call JoAnn Benton at (757) 728-7069.

2. How do I find out what jobs are open?

Individual staff chaplain jobs are not publicized. We keep applications on file at the National VA Chaplain Center and refer them for jobs as they arise. Opportunities to apply are announced online at www.usajobs.opm.gov. Enter "Chaplain" as the keyword and leave the location box empty, then click on the search button. Please be sure to submit all the documents required in the announcement.

3. Is there an age limit for applying for a job as a VA chaplain?

No. There are no age restrictions on applying for or being hired as a VA chaplain. There is also no mandatory retirement age for VA chaplains.

4. What is the "Excepted Service?"

Hiring for federal civil service jobs is designed around open, competitive, merit-based procedures administered by a federal agency called "The Office of Personnel Management" (OPM). Congress and OPM authorize some "exceptions" to the competitive procedures. These "exceptions" comprise the "excepted service." The profession of chaplain, throughout the federal government, is in the excepted service. When hiring into the excepted service each federal agency or department is responsible for setting up and administering appropriate procedures to evaluate applicants.

5. What is the "Board of Excepted Service Examiners?"

This is the official name of the chaplains at the National Chaplain Center who, as subject matter experts, evaluate all applicants for employment as VA chaplains. The official term for the evaluation process is "examining," although applicants do not take a test. The Board is comprised of Associate Directors of VA Chaplaincy who are designated by the Director of VA Chaplain Service.

6. If I don't have two units of Clinical Pastoral Education, can I still become a VA chaplain?

To become a VA chaplain you must have completed two units of Clinical Pastoral Education or the equivalent. At the end of this document is information about CPE equivalency.

7. If I have not completed the required two units of CPE or equivalent training can I be hired with the understanding that I will complete the CPE during my trial period?

No.

8. What happens to my application after I send it to the National Chaplain Center?

As soon as we have all of the required documents, your application is evaluated by the Board of Excepted Service Examiners. If you meet the minimum qualification requirements for VA Chaplain, the Board assigns a point value to each of the rating factors which are listed in the announcement. The points for each factor are totaled, and 5 or 10 points are added for veterans preference, if applicable. The final score ranges from a minimum of 70 to a maximum of 110. We then mail you a "Notice of Rating" telling you your score and verifying your choices of VA locations desired, work schedules desired, and grade(s) applied for. Your application is "active," that is, available for consideration for jobs, for one year following the date that the Board rated your application.

When a VA medical center wishes to consider chaplain applicants from outside of VA, it sends a request to the National Chaplain Center. The National Chaplain Center sends the applications of the active applicants with the highest scores who wish to be considered for the particular grade, location, and work schedule. The VA medical center contacts the individuals and performs interviews. By federal policy, the medical center must select one of the three highest-scoring applicants.

9. How long does my application stay on file at the National Chaplain Center?

Qualified applicants remain active in the National Chaplain Center file for one year after the date of the individual's Notice of Rating.

10. Can I add information and/or documents to my application file?

You may submit additional information and/or documents once during your year of eligibility and ask the Board to review your score.

11. Can I extend my eligibility at the end of a year?

Yes. We will send you a reminder about 60 days before your eligibility is about to expire. Just submit updated material in accordance with the instructions we send you. The Board will review your score and extend your eligibility.

12. Who gets veterans preference?

The rules governing veterans preference are complex. You will find an explanation of veterans preference on the internet at:

<http://www.usajobs.opm.gov/EI3.htm>

13. How do I apply for work under contract or on a fee-basis?

VA medical centers recruit locally when they need chaplains to supplement the full time and part time employed staff. Call the chaplain office at the VA location at which you wish to work and ask whether they are accepting applications for contract and/or fee-basis work.

14. How much should I write in response to the “rating factors?”

The rating factors are a sub-set of the knowledges, skills and abilities used in the job of chaplain. These particular knowledges, skills and abilities have been found to be those, the evaluation of which has been found most useful in identifying the best qualified applicants.

Your responses to the rating factors are your chance to compete “head to head” with other qualified applicants, to give specific examples of your accomplishments that you feel make you better qualified than others. This is not a test. Responses that sound theoretical or hypothetical get few points. The Board looks for specific, verifiable, accomplishments that demonstrate your abilities.

For example, when responding to “Ability to perform clinical pastoral care in a health care environment,” the response: “All patients must have a spiritual assessment performed by a qualified chaplain” gets no points. That statement tells the Board nothing about what you have done.

The Board cannot make assumptions about an individual’s knowledges, skills and abilities based on particular job titles, ranks or assignments. While the Board members are all very familiar with ministry in community settings, and ministry in the military, they can give points only for what is written in the application.

In your responses, concentrate on what makes you better qualified than others. Every qualified applicant has a Master of Divinity or equivalent, two years of ministry experience, and two units of CPE or equivalent. Therefore it is of little value to describe your Master’s degree thesis unless it is particularly relevant to pastoral care of veterans. Similarly, the preparation and delivery of sermons or homilies are tasks that nearly all applicants have performed. *Note: In your resume or application we do need descriptions of your professional ministry work in order to verify that you meet the minimum requirements. In writing responses to the rating factors you are establishing not that you are qualified, but the extent to which you exceed the minimum requirements.*

In summary- Write as much as necessary. There is no penalty for writing “too much.”

15. Should I include letters of reference with my application?

Although not required, recent recommendations from supervisors and/or colleagues may be valuable.

16. I am getting out of the military next year. When should I submit an application to the National Chaplain Center?

VA facilities usually expect selected applicants to report for duty within about 30 days. A selected individual is free to negotiate with the facility about this, but for most jobs there are multiple available applicants and facilities risk losing positions if they do not fill them promptly. Therefore you should not submit your application to the National Chaplain Center more than 60 days prior to your availability to report for duty at a VA facility. Once your complete application is at the NCC it will be evaluated before we issue any applicant lists to facilities for jobs for which you meet the criteria.

17. If I do not qualify to be a chaplain, can I apply to be a Chaplain Assistant?

No. VA does not use Chaplain Assistants. Individuals must meet all qualification requirements at the time that they are hired.

18 . I don't know if I meet all the requirements for employment as a VA Chaplain. Is there some way that I can find out before I spend a lot of time on the application?

Yes. Phone Jo Ann Benton or John Batten at the National VA Chaplain Center, at 757-728-7069 or 757-728-7062. They may be able to tell you over the phone, or they may invite you to submit a partial application for review.

INFORMATION FOR APPLICANTS FOR VA CHAPLAINCY ABOUT CLINICAL PASTORAL EDUCATION (CPE)

To qualify for VA Chaplaincy, you must have completed 2 units of CPE, or have equivalent training. Units of CPE completed in programs accredited by the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE) or the College of Pastoral Supervision and Psychotherapy (CPSP) meet this requirement.

Equivalent training is not less than 800 hours of supervised ministry in a health care setting, such as a hospital or nursing home, which incorporated both ministry formation and pastoral care skills development.

To be considered equivalent to CPE, training must include the following components:

1. It must be a formal educational program, with curriculum, theological reflection, and evaluation components, which includes a component of performing health care ministry.
2. The program must include 400 hours of supervised education, training and ministry for equivalency to one unit of CPE.
3. The educational supervisor(s), preceptor(s), teacher(s), or coach/mentor(s), responsible for the program must be qualified to provide the supervision.
4. The educational model must include an action/reflection component (that may vary from one program to another) that may have included but not be limited to: verbatims, case conferences, worship seminars, spiritual assessments, theological reflection, and group process.

In describing supervised ministry that you would like to be considered as “equivalent training” please include the following information for each period of training

- The beginning and ending dates of training
- The name and location of the institution(s) in which the supervised ministry was performed
- The name(s) and title(s) of the educational supervisor(s)/instructor(s)
- The total number of hours of performance of ministry, classroom or didactics, and individual meetings with the supervisor/instructor
- The learning objectives, the method(s) of reporting on and evaluation of the practice of ministry, and how feedback from peers and teachers was obtained

Please provide supporting documents along with your narrative description of the training. Examples of supporting documents include: Written evaluation of your performance in the program, showing that you successfully completed the training, signed by the supervisor or an appropriate individual; or a certificate, letter, or other document verifying completion of the training.

If you cannot provide any supporting documents, please tell us why.

Detailed information about CPE is on the web site of the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education at www.acpe.edu.