

RECOMMENDATION

The Presbytery of Blackhawk overtures the 224th General Assembly (2020) to direct the Office of Worship and Theology to consult with military chaplains, mental health professionals and other Christian traditions to develop worship resources and other appropriate rituals that pastors and military chaplains could use to assist military personnel when they are sent for training, when they are deployed and when they return home from deployment. The new worship resources should be available to chaplains and pastors at the 225th General Assembly (2022).

RATIONALE

The problem is that on average twenty-two veterans die by suicide every day owing to “moral injury” and unresolved post traumatic stress. It’s not just recent veterans, but veterans of all ages are dying by suicide at an alarming rate ([Alarming VA Report Totals Decade of Veteran Suicides](#) by Richard Sisk, 9/23/19, [military.com](#)). Obviously far too many soldiers are facing “moral injury” and post traumatic stress issues without getting the help they need. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) currently has no resources available to help soldiers when they leave for service or when they return home.

Ancient Israel had cleansing rituals to welcome warriors back into the community after returning from war (Numbers 31: 19 - 24). They recognized that war could make a person feel dirty, and that special rituals could help returning fighters deal with that sense of uncleanness so they could rejoin the community. Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabriella Lettini in their book *Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury after War* write that in addition to deep grief over the loss of comrades and sometimes horrendous memories of what they have seen, veterans can often suffer from “moral injury.” It is a violation of one’s conscience that can occur in the heat of war. The Christian church as a channel of God’s grace and healing power is in a unique position to address “moral injury.” In fact, as Brock and Lettini note, the church in the first millennium recognized this and “required that anyone who ‘shed human blood’ to undergo a rehabilitation process that included reverting to the status of someone who had not been baptized and was undergoing training in the Christian faith.” While this seems a little extreme

today, it would be helpful if the church had liturgies that addressed the needs of returning soldiers to help them discover or perhaps rediscover the love and forgiveness God offers us in Christ and through the Christian community.

What sort of new worship resources would be helpful? *Resources for sending:* resources for congregations sending their young people into military service; resources for congregations and military chaplains for sending soldiers when they are being deployed: resources that remind soldiers and their families that God is with them. *And resources for welcoming home:* resources for local congregations and military chaplains to welcome soldiers back and to help them reintegrate into the community; and resources that pastors and Christian therapists could use with small groups or in one-to-one counseling.