

EQUIPPING THE U.S. ARMY AND THE CHURCH TO ASSIST MILITARY PERSONS EXPERIENCING GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT

Wm. Holt Liptrot

One of the most traumatic events in life is the death of a child or another loved one. In the United States Army there exists a military care system to assist the living, visit the sick, and honor the dead, but this system lacks adequate help for those in mourning. Often military and church leaders fail to understand the process of grief and bereavement and its tremendous impact on the individual. These leaders require information to provide effective care during these times.

Military and spiritual leaders are often ignorant of the rights and options of the bereaved in the Army. Specifically, most leaders are unaware of the current policy concerning emergency leave for those on foreign tours. This policy is manifested in the Blue Bark Program. Existing Army Regulation (AR) on bereavement must include mandatory notification of this provision.

This project provided a seminar designed to illustrate the process for implementing the Army's Blue Bark Program. The target audience for the seminar consisted of senior military Chaplains, Officers, Department of the Army Civilians (DA-Civilians), and pastors to effectively address grief and bereavement.

The seminar identified and transmitted valuable resources for this target audience on the spiritual and psychological issues that individuals experience at various ages when encountering grief and bereavement. The seminar surveyed bereavement stages, offered ideas and methods for assisting the bereaved in a military context, and provided resources to increase effectiveness in addressing bereavement. It also sought to change the current policy by illustrating the process for developing the Army's Blue Bark Program—designed to enhance the recovery, resiliency and retention of mentally wounded soldiers and their families as well as ensure notification of the Blue Bark policy upon the death of a military dependent in a foreign deployment.