

Military Chaplain

The United States Army, Navy and Air Force have a corps of chaplains who provide chaplaincy ministry. These chaplain/staff officers serve on active duty or in a capacity as a Reserve or Guard chaplain. This area also includes the volunteer chaplains of the Civil Air Patrol, an Air Force auxiliary service and Auxiliary Clergy Support of the Coast Guard. Also, each state has an organized State National Guard with an associated chaplaincy service. Additionally, some states may have a militia or State Defense Force.

In addition to SBC General Endorsement Requirements, check with the Military Chaplain Recruiter of the particular Military Branch for the most current requirements, including age.

U.S. Army Chaplain Requirements (Active Duty, Army Reserve, and Army Guard)

- Ordained minister of or recognized by a Southern Baptist Convention Church.
- Valid SBC endorsement.
- Undergraduate degree of 120 semester hours from an accredited institution.
- Master of Divinity/Theology degree of at least 72 hours from an accredited institution.
- Citizen of the United States (Permanent residents can apply for US Army Reserve only).
- Pass the National Agency Check for a security clearance.
- Pass Armed Forces physical exam.
- Two years pastoral experience within a congregational setting.

For U.S. Army Chaplain Candidate Program:

- Be a full-time graduate student at an accredited seminary or theological school.
- Be between 18-36 years of age at time of commissioning.
- Ordination is not required.

U.S. Air Force Chaplain Requirements (Active Duty, Reserve, and National Guard)

- Ordained Minister of or recognized by an SBC Church.
- Valid SBC endorsement.
- Undergraduate degree of 120 semester hours from an accredited institution.
- Master of Divinity/Theology degree of at least 72 hours from an accredited institution.
- Citizen of the United States.
- Pass the National Agency Check for a security clearance.
- Pass Armed Forces physical exam.
- Two years pastoral experience within a congregational setting.

For U.S. Air Force Chaplain Candidate Program:

- Be a full-time graduate student at an accredited seminary or theological school.
- Less than 35 years of age at the time of appointment.
- Ordination is not required.

U.S. Navy Chaplain Requirements (Active Duty and Reserve)

- Ordained Minister of or recognized by an SBC Church.
- Valid SBC endorsement.
- Undergraduate degree of 120 semester hours from an accredited institution.
- Master of Divinity/Theology degree of at least 72 hours from an accredited institution.
- Citizen of the United States.
- Pass the National Agency Check for a security clearance.
- Pass Armed Forces physical exam.
- Pass a Navy physical fitness test.
- Two years pastoral experience within a congregational setting.

For U.S. Navy Chaplain Candidate Program:

- Be a full-time graduate student at an accredited seminary or theological school.
- Be 21 years of age and be able to complete 20 years.
- Ordination is not required.

Civil Air Patrol Chaplain Requirements

- Ordained Minister of or recognized by an SBC Church.
- Valid SBC endorsement.
- Undergraduate degree of 120 semester hours from an accredited institution.
- Master of Divinity/Theology degree of at least 72 hours from an accredited institution. Clergy without accredited graduate degree may ask for a waiver providing they have a minimum of 5 years full time pastoral experience.
- Two years pastoral experience within a congregation setting.
- Meet CAP Senior Membership requirements.
- Fingerprint card and background check.
- Pay CAP national and wing dues.
- Contact your wing chaplain for an application (CAP Form 35).

Coast Guard Auxiliary Clergy Support

The Auxiliary Clergy Support program supplements and supports Navy chaplains serving with the Coast Guard by expanding Religious Ministry within the Coast Guard to better meet the needs of Coast Guard members and their families.

- Ordained Minister of or recognized by an SBC Church.

- Be a member of the Coast Guard Auxiliary.
- Must meet many of the same qualifications as members of the Navy Chaplain Corps.

General Endorsement Requirements

When using vocational or volunteer chaplains, each institutional agency and organization sets specific requirements for their hiring criteria. In addition, the Southern Baptist Convention has its own denominational requirements for endorsing chaplains. All chaplains endorsed by the SBC must meet these minimum requirements:

- Demonstrate the call, competence and character for ministry as a chaplain.
 - › The applicant must demonstrate a call to the ministry. This involves not only the written communication, but actions showing a personal commitment to Christian ministry.
 - › The applicant must have proven character in line with his/her call to chaplain ministry. Chaplains are expected to live their personal and professional lives with the highest practice of integrity in accordance with the [Chaplaincy Code of Conduct](#). A chaplain's personal character must be consistent with the spiritual leadership required to work with people.
 - › Background Check that includes credit, criminal and sexual offenses.
- Be affiliated with the SBC for a minimum of one year and a member in good standing of a church affiliated with the SBC for at least six months. All endorsed chaplains are expected to maintain membership in a Southern Baptist church and develop an accountability relationship with a Southern Baptist church. This accountability should relate to the chaplain's personal life as well as their exercise of ministry in their ministry context.
- References including one from applicant's SBC Pastor, ministerial staff, or Director of Missions/Associational Mission Strategist.
- For vocational chaplains, be licensed, commissioned or ordained by an SBC church or church of like faith recognized by the applicant's SBC current church. This recognizes the role of the local church in affirming the ministry of the applicant.
- Have theological beliefs currently adopted by the SBC as represented in the [Baptist Faith and Message 2000](#). Additionally, applicants and endorsed chaplains are to affirm compliance and support of the following policies:
 - › Divorced people will be assessed with grace and mercy on an individual basis in accordance with NAMB policy.¹
 - › [Chaplaincy Code of Conduct](#).
- Vocational chaplains must have accredited theological training consistent with their projected ministry assignment. A Master of Divinity degree or equivalent is often required for vocational chaplains.
- Volunteer chaplains are expected to be actively engaged in chaplain-specific training.
- Meet requirements of employing agency - the Chaplain Commission will not endorse a chaplain who does not meet the requirements of the employing agency.
- Approval by the Chaplains Commission.

¹ For specific details, see Chaplaincy Endorsement Manual, "Divorce and Remarriage," 32.

Duration of Endorsements

An endorsement is to a specific position. Any change in employment requires an update of endorsement. Some ministerial training programs have a specified duration. When the chaplain completes the training, the endorsement terminates. Some endorsements have a specified period of time for which they are valid. This termination date is usually stated on the endorsement and/or is expressed by the Institution's policy. If an endorsement is no longer required, the endorsement will be listed as "closed" until an update is requested. A chaplain may request the withdrawal of endorsement at any time. The Chaplain Commission may request the withdrawal of endorsement at any time due to circumstances such as doctrinal stance, moral failure or other substantial issues.

All endorsements terminate when the chaplain is no longer affiliated with the organization to which they were endorsed and/or the chaplain no longer meets the SBC requirements for endorsement.

Endorsement Updates

Periodically, the using agency will ask that the chaplain have an updated endorsement. It is the responsibility of the chaplain to initiate the process for updating an endorsement. A chaplain should contact the SBC Chaplaincy Team to request an endorsement update when their status or ministry location changes. Also, endorsement update requests can be made through the chaplain's portal (mynamb.net). Chaplains are allowed to have more than one endorsement.

Chaplains can request an update by contacting the SBC Chaplaincy Team or through their Chaplain portal at mynamb.net. Once started, the chaplain will need to complete an Endorsement Update Application and submit appropriate supporting documents. All endorsed chaplains are required to ensure a current profile and Quarterly Report. Federal Endorsement update requires SBC church membership verification and OER/AER. When a chaplain requests an update to a vocational endorsement from a volunteer endorsement, the basic requirements/guidelines for that chaplaincy category and status applies. At least four weeks should be allowed for the update endorsement process to be completed.

Transferring an Endorsement

A chaplain can only be endorsed through one endorsing body. However, a chaplain can change ecclesiastical endorsement at any time for a variety of reasons. Any transfer of endorsement to another religious ecclesiastical organization requires the chaplain to inform their current endorsing agent. The ecclesiastical endorsement process, requirements, and timeline differs among the various religious ecclesiastical organizations. As a general rule, SBC Chaplaincy provides a 90-day transition period for transfer of endorsement to another religious ecclesiastical body.

Oversight and Supervision

Chaplains serve an institution at that institution's invitation and therefore are under the direct supervision of the institution's supervisory structure. Additionally, the Chaplains Commission, through the administrative actions and pastoral care of the SBC Chaplaincy Team, retains ecclesiastical oversight of the chaplain's work and life as a representative of the SBC. The SBC Chaplaincy Team members are available to respond to any questions or concerns.

Each applicant applying for denominational endorsement by the Chaplains Commission signs the following agreement to assure the Chaplains Commission of the applicant's understanding, acceptance and willingness to cooperate in carrying out the Commission's policies and purposes. The statement reads:

In making this application, I recognize the Chaplains Commission of the North American Mission Board, SBC, to be the agency designated by the Southern Baptist Convention to endorse chaplains to military and civilian agencies and agree to cooperate with the Chaplains Commission, SBC, in carrying out its policies and programs.²

Discipline and Withdrawal of an SBC Endorsement

In the event that an endorsed chaplain violates a law (local, state, federal, including Uniform Code of Military Justice), agency policy, SBC general expectation, **Chaplaincy Code of Conduct**, personal or professional ethic, or should there be an embarrassment to the cause of Christ, the SBC or SBC Chaplaincy, disciplinary action may be in order. The Chaplains Commission desires that justice, grace and mercy be exercised in all situations with the goal being personal redemption and restoration. However, withdrawal of endorsement may result from any situation deemed by the Chaplains Commission to warrant such action.

² Statement taken from current SBC Endorsement application.