



Center for the Study of Religious Freedom

29 January 2013

Brigadier General Scottie D. Carpenter
Department of the Army
Headquarters, 311th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary)
Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan

Re: Chaplain (1LT) Christopher J. Antal

Dear General Carpenter:

This letter is written in support of Chaplain (1LT) Christopher J. Antal and in response to the Memorandum of Reprimand dated 22 January 2013.

I am an ordained Unitarian Universalist minister and a Unitarian Universalist theologian. My doctoral (Ph.D.) studies focused on the theologies of Unitarian Universalism and related religious traditions. My published writings include two books and many articles (for both scholarly and popular journals) on Unitarian Universalism and its theological principles, including its understanding of issues relating to war and peace. For the past eight years I have served as Director of the Center for the Study of Religious Freedom at Virginia Wesleyan College. In this capacity I am experienced in matters of religious freedom, including the First Amendment principles of non-establishment and free exercise of religion, as well as in interfaith relations.

I can affirm that Chaplain Antal's public prayer entitled "A Veteran's Day Confession for America" violates no tenet of the Unitarian Universalist faith. In both its content and its tone, the Confession speaks both to and from the heart of Unitarian Universalism. Moreover, in my judgment the Confession does not bring dishonor to the United States military. Instead, it constitutes a careful and sensitive expression of concern by a chaplain toward those in his spiritual care.

All ministers, including military chaplains, must constantly honor and balance their pastoral and prophetic roles. This dual responsibility is recognized in Army Regulation 165-1 and it has always been part of the Unitarian Universalist ministry. These dual roles are sometimes in tension with each other, but more often they work together in mutually supportive ways. That is the case with Chaplain Antal's Confession, which blends and balances the pastoral and prophetic voices in a constructive and effective manner.

By addressing the difficult emotional and spiritual concerns that inevitably arise in military combat, the Confession provided an important pastoral service to the soldiers who attended Chaplain Antal's Veteran's Day worship service in Kandahar, as well as the soldiers, veterans, and family members who may have read the Confession on the Church of the Larger Fellowship website. And, by addressing



difficult issues relating to the larger society's attitudes toward war and those who serve in them – attitudes which are well-known to the military – the Confession spoke in an important and appropriate prophetic manner.

Unitarian Universalism fully recognizes military service as an honorable profession, an attitude shared by Chaplain Antal. Our denomination provides a range of support services for those in military service, veterans, and their families. Our military chaplains, including Chaplain Antal, are an important part of this structure. We encourage those within our tradition who undertake military service to bring our core religious values with them in their service. These values – including integrity, respect, compassion, interdependence, humility, and the inherent worth and dignity of all persons – are fully consonant with the values of the U.S. military.

I believe that in his chaplaincy, including his Veteran's Day Confession, Chaplain (1LT) Christopher J. Antal has upheld these values and has brought honor, not dishonor, to both Unitarian Universalism and the United States Military.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "P. Rasor" with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rev. Dr. Paul Rasor, J.D., M.Div., Ph.D.
Joan P. and Macon F. Brock Jr. Director