

Talking Points on Chaplains and Same-Sex Weddings

Background: As has always been the case, Navy chaplains perform religious ministry according to the tenets of their faith. Chaplains can currently officiate at a same-sex wedding if doing so is consistent with the tenets of their faith, it is conducted in accordance with state law, and the chaplain is otherwise fully certified to officiate at weddings in that state. Regardless of the sexual orientation of the requestor, chaplains are always expected to exercise their best professional judgment on whether it is appropriate and lawful to perform a wedding. The June 26 Supreme Court decision on same-sex marriage does not impact the Chaplain Corps' approach to ministry. This briefing card is intended to help chaplains answer questions they may receive from their command or social circles on this topic. OSD has the lead for all media queries.

DoD Statement:

The Department of Defense remains committed to ensuring that all men and women who serve our country, and their families, are treated fairly and equally.

The Department of Defense has made the same benefits available to all military spouses, regardless of sexual orientation, as long as service member sponsors provide a valid marriage certificate. All spousal and family benefits, including ID Cards, were made available September 3, 2013. As was the case before the Supreme Court's ruling in 2013, a military chaplain, as well as individual service members, may participate in any private ceremony, whether on or off a military installation, provided that the ceremony is not prohibited by applicable state and local law. Further, a chaplain is not required to participate in or officiate at a private ceremony if doing so would be in variance with the tenets of his or her religion or personal beliefs.

Statement for chaplain officiant:

"As a Navy chaplain, I provide religious services and rites for members of my own faith according to the guidance and teachings of my faith tradition and religious organization. The wedding I conducted today is consistent with the teachings of my religious faith, and I was honored to participate in this holy occasion."

Talking Points:

- Navy chaplains are not required to officiate at any wedding. Navy chaplains are expected to exercise their best professional judgment on whether it is appropriate and lawful to perform a wedding.
- Chaplains can officiate at a same-sex wedding if doing so is consistent with the tenets of their faith, it is conducted in accordance with state law, and the chaplain is otherwise fully certified to officiate at weddings in that state.
- Wedding ceremonies can take place at base locations or facilities, including chapels and MWR Catering Centers, without regard to the sexual orientation of the requestor.
- Navy chaplains are committed to treating everyone with dignity, respect, and compassion and agree to work together cooperatively, without compromising their beliefs, to ensure the religious needs of our people are met.

Posture: Passive/RTQ

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- Navy chaplains support religious freedom in the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard by providing religious ministry directly or by facilitating religious support through other chaplains, lay leaders, and clergy. Chaplains also care for all which can include making informed and professional referrals to other support resources.

Q&A

Q. Now that same-sex marriage has been legalized in all 50 states, will there be any kind of new local policy issued for chaplains to marry same-sex couples on base?

As has always been the case, Navy chaplains perform religious ministry according to the tenets of their faith. Chaplains can currently officiate at a same-sex wedding if doing so is consistent with the tenets of their faith, and it is conducted in accordance with state law and the chaplain is otherwise fully certified to officiate at weddings in that state.

Q. Can base facilities be used for the wedding, now that same-sex marriage is federal law and legal in all 50 states?

Yes. Wedding ceremonies can take place at base locations or facilities such as chapels and MWR Catering Centers on a sexual-orientation-neutral basis.

Q. Does this mean chaplains will now be compelled to perform a same-sex wedding since it's the law?

While Navy chaplains care for all with dignity, respect, and compassion, they are not required to officiate at any wedding. As has always been the case, Navy chaplains perform religious ministry according to the tenets of their faith and exercise their best professional judgment on whether performing the religious service for a wedding is advisable, within the law, and acceptable within their own religious organization.

Q. Will chaplains be forced to conduct same-sex marriage retreats at CREDO?

Chaplains cannot be required to perform official duties that violate the tenets of their religious organization. As in any other environment within the DON, chaplains assigned to CREDO maintain this protection and shall not be required to conduct a retreat if doing so would violate the tenets of their religious organization. As Navy chaplains, we continue to treat everyone with dignity and respect and work together cooperatively, without compromising our beliefs, to ensure the religious needs of our people are met.

Relevant Policy: Under SECNAVINST 1730.7D, “Religious Ministry within the Department of the Navy,” chaplains cannot be required to perform official duties that violate the tenets of their religious organization.