

AMCF & MMI Brief for AMI Conference September 2017

By: Revd Cdr Mike Terry RN, AMCF Vice President for Europe, South and Central

Your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear members and friends of AMI, fellow delegates, I bring you greetings in the Lord for your General Assembly and Conference from General Srilal Weerasooriya, World President of the Association of Military Christian Fellowships (AMCF).

This year is the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther nailing his 95 Theses to the door of Wittenberg Cathedral, sparking the Protestant Reformation of the Western Church. So I thank you most sincerely for giving me, an Anglican priest, grace to address this annual conference: I feel I am among friends!

To introduce myself briefly, I joined the British Royal Navy as a Marine Engineer Officer in 1975 and left in the rank of Commander in 2006, my service having included the Falklands War in 1982 and NATO patrols off Bosnia in 1994. Currently I am a part-time vicar, jointly with my wife, of a south-coast parish of 10,000 people, and I am privileged to be a Vice President (VP) of AMCF. The aim of this paper is to outline AMCF and the work of one of its principal supporting organisations, Military Ministries International (MMI). I will start with a short history, look at the organisations of AMCF and MMI, then precis their work.

History

It is estimated there are 20 million military personnel on active duty world-wide, 36 million more in reserve forces, and 8 million in paramilitary forces. This is well over 60 million men and women bearing arms for their nations today. They all have the potential to change the lives of the millions of people living under their authority and protection. Many are Christian and many more, in their service, display a willingness to sacrifice for something outside themselves. That makes the sacrifice of Christ an attractive mystery to them. They are a significant mission field, a huge pastoral opportunity and a wonderful group that could influence our world for good and for God. The work of AMCF is to promote the work of Christ among such people. So how did AMCF begin?

The military has played a vital role in Christian history. Franz Cardinal König gave a useful summary¹ in your 50th anniversary publication which I will not repeat. Suffice to say that the acclamation at the cross of Christ as Son of God was by a Centurion², the first Gentile Christian church was in the home of an officer of the Italian Regiment³ and without the interventions of military officers we would not have many of St Paul's letters. We know that Christian witness in the military has been continuous since those early days.

Military people hold the power of life and death over others, yet Military Christians have a hope of life beyond death through Jesus, and are accountable to God Almighty for their actions. This has been crucial throughout history as it serves: as a corrective for immoral and abusive behaviour of the military; to sustain peace; to restrain evil; to limit unjust actions in war; to restore peace after war. It was the first of these issues that gave rise to the modern concept of Military Christian Fellowships (MCFs). In 1851 Captain Trotter, a British Officer in India, became so upset at the immoral and dissolute behaviour of his troops that he sought prayer support from friends in UK as he tried to bring spiritual help to his men. Thus was born the lay-led British Army Prayer Union, probably the first formal MCF.

¹ A useful summary is provided by Franz Carinal König in: "The Christian Soldier in the Service of Just Peace" AMI anniversary Publication 1965-2015, page 85.

² Matthew 27:54

³ Acts 10

Similar lay-led fellowships started in other nations' militaries. After World War 1 the four Officers' Christian Fellowships of Germany, The Netherlands, Sweden and the UK decided to cooperate. They met in 1930 under the leadership of the Dutch Baron van Tuyll van Serooskerken, who became the first President of this association, that grew into AMCF.

Coming from these different national, cultural and church backgrounds, these 'Founding Fathers' decided their new association needed some fundamental principles. It was to:

- Be non-denominational,
- Be open to all Christian confessions,
- Have no affiliation to any church denomination,
- Have no central organisation, staff, budget or office.

Thus there were no ties, compulsions or doctrinal statements that could exclude some, or provide a power-base for others. The one over-arching principle was to be that of Galatians 3:28, "We are all one in Jesus Christ". Under that banner, the prime aim was to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to military personnel globally, working towards each nation eventually having its own mature, effective MCF.

National MCFs are to be independent, non-political and self-governing, with their own national characteristics and focus. MCFs are organised and financed as their members see fit. Most are run by volunteers while a very few have paid staff. MCFs are supposed to be open to Christians of all denominations, although membership varies from one region to another. In short, AMCF is not really an organisation but rather a hub around which autonomous MCFs (and individual military Christians in nations without MCFs) agree to associate, as seen in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1: MCFs associating via AMCF

As with AMI, there is also an International Prayer: "Heavenly Father, we thank you that the Blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin. Bless the service men and women of all nations, and grant that we who know the joy of being 'All one in Christ Jesus' may be filled with your love and pass it on to others through the power of the Holy Spirit until His coming again. Amen." This prayer encompasses the AMCF desire to reach out with the love of Christ, as well as for each individual to grow in it (evangelisation and discipleship if you like) in fulfilment of Christ's command in Matthew 28:19-20.

All these principles and aims are given in the modern AMCF Manual⁴, which contains the original principles above, expanded by experience gained over the past 87 years.

AMCF Today

Since 1930 AMCF has grown from four to 155 member nations: at our 2014 world conference in Cape Town, around 100 nations were represented by almost 550 delegates from every continent. Catholics, Orthodox, Pentecostals, Brethren, Baptists, Anglicans and many others were there. They came from Russia and Ukraine: Bulgarians, a Macedonian, a Serb and a Croat spent the week in close fellowship; Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Sri Lankans and Nepalese talked and studied together; Egyptians, a Tunisian, a Palestinian and Turk worshipped with serving Israeli Defence Force members; a strong friendship was formed between delegates from Israel's Defence Force and the Palestinian Authority which continues today. Ordinary sailors mixed easily with 4-star Generals. I can report there were no funerals, and the worship was a foretaste of heaven!⁵ This is the exciting work of God's Holy Spirit which AMCF seeks to serve.

However it is clearly impossible for a single AMCF President to manage it all! Thus our current President, General Srilal Weerasooriya of Sri Lanka, has 14 VPs to assist him, all self-funding volunteers, and each covering a specific geographic area. These work to encourage MCFs and individuals within their areas as they are able.

Principal Support Organisations and MMI

Now, while individual MCFs may (or may not) have staff and budgets, AMCF certainly doesn't. So how does AMCF actually DO anything? We only have a President and 14 VPs to cover around 200 nations! In 1972 an organisation called ACCTS⁶ was formed in America to support the growing work of AMCF. This, the first Principal Support Organisation (PSO), has since spawned MMI based in the UK and the Mission Support Organisation in South Korea. These three lay-led PSOs support and work closely with the MCFs and VPs within their own geographical spheres of influence but also often work together. Most of their staffs have direct military experience, and many raise their own funding to support their work.

Each PSO is of different size and differently organised, and their leaders meet to share ideas and initiatives to ensure no misunderstandings or duplication of effort. PSO key personnel also meet formally with the AMCF Presidential Bench every 5 years.

There are many other organisations with similar aims to AMCF. Because one of the key principles is cooperation, AMCF, PSOs and MCFs work closely with these other groups, many of which are listed in the AMCF Manual. Key among them are national Chaplaincies, where they exist – in many nations they do not. Where they exist, Chaplains are the formal representatives of official churches and hold ecclesiastical and military authority which MCFs do not. Hence it is key for Chaplains to understand the MCFs (supported by AMCF and the PSOs) are 'force multipliers' for their own work; they are not competitors in the same field. Thus the overall AMCF schematic looks like Figure 2 below, where the PSOs support AMCF and the MCFs, and there is interaction between them and other organisations:

⁴ <http://www.amcf-int.org/resources/AMCF-reference-manual/English/AMCFHandbook2015.pdf>

⁵ Revelation 7 : 9-10

⁶ The Association of Christian Conferences, Teaching and Services was so called to avoid any reference to the military in its title. Thus it was hoped to avoid any difficulty when working with military Christians in nations where a Christian or religious influence would not be welcome.

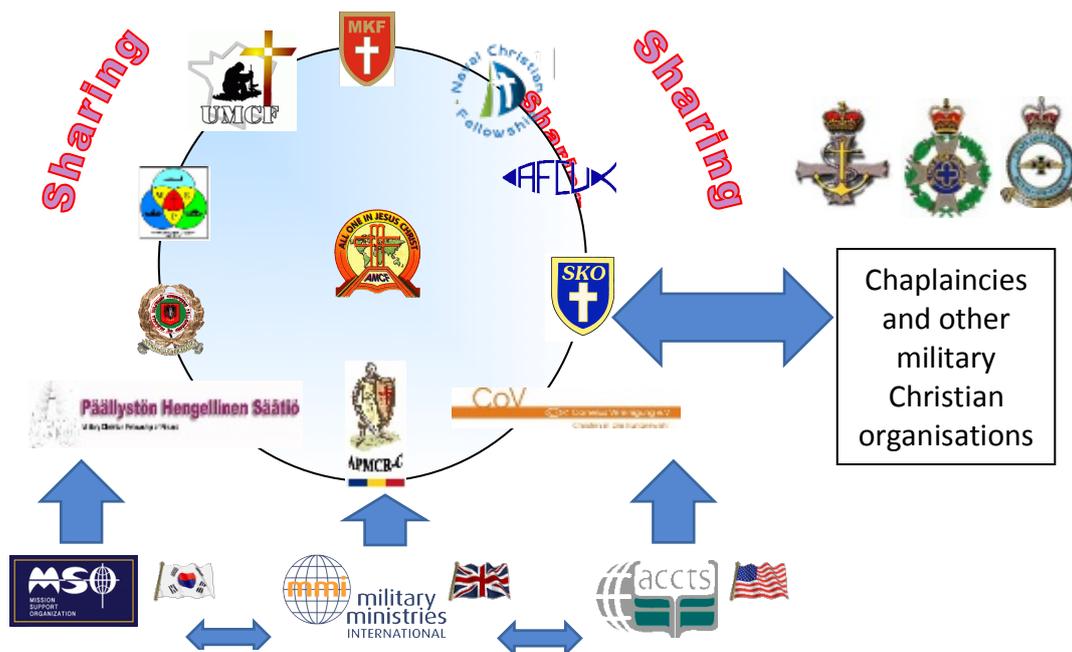


Fig 2: AMCF schematic relationships

Having previously worked for MMI, I will describe the PSOs' work by specific reference to MMI. Its motto is "Building Disciples – Shaping Nations" and it exists "to see the Kingdom of God established and growing in the military of every country we serve."⁷ MMI also adopted the Apostles' Creed as its basis of faith since its truths are universal to all Christian traditions and avoids the 'Filioque' issue so sensitive for our Orthodox brethren. MMI aspires to be:

- Faith-based (Ephesians 3:20-21)
- Prayer-led (Philippians 4:6)
- Christ-like, servant-hearted and relational (Philippians 2:5-8 & John 14:12-13)
- Accepting we are all one in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:28)
- Pioneering and adventurous (Acts 1:8)
- Collaborative and team-focussed (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)
- Committed to excellence (Colossians 3:23)

MMI's principle areas of operation are in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and South Asia. This covers 8 of the 14 VPs' areas, yet MMI is the smallest PSO. So the need for PSOs to cooperate is clear!

Organisationally, MMI has four Area Team Leaders who operate under both the AMCF Principles and MMI's values above, while being careful of each area's geographic, political, religious and cultural sensitivities. The only full-time person was the Chief Executive who also had the role of Team Leader for all of Africa. He has just retired and a replacement is being sought. The Revd Grozdan Stoevski, MMI's Bulgarian European Team Leader, is the only clergyman among the ten part-time people involved in MMI's field-work. Like me, he runs a church in addition to the military part of his vocation. Office support is provided by a small team of part-time folk. This includes the vital work of coordinating prayer support.

MMI is funded purely by supporters who are, largely, retired, aging UK military personnel. An excellent recent cooperative development is MMI's invitation for Flt Lt Revd Neil Galloway to join their Executive Council as an observer for AMI.

⁷ <http://www.mmi.org.uk/about-us-2/vision-mission/>

The Work

The AMCF Manual describes the work of AMCF, PSOs and MCFs in detail but the headings below give a good summary:

- Prayer, first and foremost.
- Reaching out: Primarily by travel.
- Meeting Together: arranging conferences globally (every 10 years), regionally and sub-regionally.
- Communicating.⁸
- Teaching and Encouraging.
- Cooperating, particularly with military Chaplaincies, where they exist⁹.

It is interesting to compare AMCF with AMI's purposes¹⁰:

- To promote at national and international levels the affirmation of a Christian vision of military life and of the values that characterize this vision
- To promote and support international understanding and cooperation, as a contribution to strengthening peace in the world.
- To study together, in the light of the Gospel and teachings of the Church, the spiritual, moral and social problems peculiar to the military sphere.
- To keep an open mind towards ecumenical work.
- To make known the activities of AMI in countries, or to associations and organizations, who are not yet members.

For the purposes of illustration, I'll describe just a few of the events that MMI, and its respective VP's, have been involved in recently as they change the lives of serving military personnel. This is the most exciting part of what happens under the AMCF umbrella:

- Teaching and training:
 - Marriage Seminars, Stewardship courses and Christian military ethics seminars have revolutionised the lives of military families, particularly in eastern Europe.
 - For the Cape Town World Conference, young sailors and soldiers were trained as hosts and group leaders; when these "Warriors" returned to work, their superiors noted the improvement in their characters and their positive influence in their units.
 - The Peshmerga military college in Erbil has requested Christian military ethical teaching for its students.
- Activity retreats:
 - Skiing, Sailing, Summer Adventure Retreats and Bible camps have all featured and been instrumental in providing Christian input to the lives of young military people, using action-based environments to promote fellowship, fun and places to share personal issues. These create international friendships that last a lifetime.
- Providing Resources:
 - A Bible-based Discipleship Correspondence Course written at the invitation of local Bishops specifically for Pakistani Christian Soldiers has now been translated and distributed much more widely.

⁸ As I wrote this I heard of an East Asian man who attended a Korean conference and then 'disappeared' for a week on his return home. He was arrested with no reason given, interrogated about his faith and eventually released with threats to tell no-one of his experience. No-one had noticed his disappearance so the support from abroad was vital to sustaining his faith.

⁹ This is a biblical principle for spiritual 'force multiplication'.

¹⁰ AMI's Statutes quoted in: "The Christian Soldier in the Service of Just Peace" AMI anniversary publication 1965-2015, page 89

- A four-wheel drive vehicle was sourced recently for Chaplaincy work in a French-speaking African nation.
- Bibles have been sourced and distributed to the Presidential Guards in Bulgaria, the front line in Ukraine (in versions approved by the Orthodox Church) and several African nations.
- Organising conferences with AMCF VPs:
 - Middle East (in Cyprus);
 - African regional Prayer Conferences;
 - Annual European Military Christian Meeting (Germany) for key MCF personnel.
- Stimulating work with other like-minded groups:
 - The second International Orthodox Consultation, stimulated by MMI, is a gathering of Orthodox Bishops and clergy in Bulgaria this November, specifically to consider how to progress with military chaplaincy in Orthodox nations.
 - Representation at AMI.
- Attending and speaking at national MCF meetings:
 - Individual national MCFs host periodic conferences: the new Italian MCF is now hosting several regional conferences a year.
 - The French Protestant Chaplaincy hosts a large annual international gathering.
 - Some MCFs host sub-regional international conferences: the Croat MCF is still very small but has a heart to reach out in healing and reconciliation across the Balkans – they are raising funds to make a video on how the love of Christ overcomes hatred, bitterness and division and the trailer is very impressive!
 - Such events are valuable for making new contacts and supporting existing ones.
- Supporting vulnerable military Christians in dangerous environments by prayer, visits, phone calls and correspondence. This helps them connect to the wider church.
- Exploratory visits to meet potential new contacts. This year visits have taken place to Armenia and the Apostolic Church there, as well as to Kosovo – the old and the new! India is opening up this year too, as is another sensitive nation in that region.

The courses, activities and resources are available to any military Christian regardless of rank, race or denomination. Please do publicise them to your own military personnel!

Today's world is as troubled as ever, with many of its difficulties put so clearly in your 2010 Declaration of Berlin¹¹. In addition, dozens of countries are run by dictatorships or absolute rulers, most of which rely on the military for their primary support. In many other nations people live under corrupt governments where the military, police, and other officials are also corrupt and prey on citizens for bribes and favours. Because they are armed and have much authority, the conduct of the military often determines the level of freedom, justice, prosperity, and rule of law that the people of that nation enjoy. In many other nations the military is ignored and under-valued. Yet they still hold power to shape these nations.

So my final example of AMCF's work is not listed in the Manual. This long-term work has resulted in the avoidance of bloodshed because Christian military leaders were in key positions. An African Army Chief prevented a genocide by countermanding a Presidential Order. He had become a Christian through hospitality offered by military Christians during training in UK. A Ukrainian officer was ordered to shoot on demonstrators but, after prayer with like-minded fellows, did not and averted an even greater loss of life. In central America, Christian military leaders avoided much bloodshed in a turbulent situation by coming

¹¹ Declaration of the AMI General Assembly October 2010 in Berlin, "The Christian Soldier in the Service of Just Peace" in: "The Christian Soldier in the Service of Just Peace" AMI anniversary Publication 1965-2015, especially pages 68-71.

together for prayer and listening to God. These had all been trained and supported somehow by AMCF, PSOs and MCFs.

In John 17, Jesus spoke with His disciples immediately before he suffered and died for us. That was not a time to waste words. Yet three times he prayed to the Father for our unity.¹² Twice our Lord gave the reason for His prayer – that the world would believe that the Father sent Him out of love. Somehow, our unity in Christ, a unity of purpose, prayer and action, is a vital part of fulfilling God’s and our mission to show the world who Jesus Christ really is.

Thus I am most grateful for the warmth of your welcome and for the gift of your fellowship, not only because it is good and enjoyable, but also because it is one way we can show that unity and, answering a prayer of Jesus himself, help to reach the world’s military for Christ. As we search together for “Ten Commandments” to guide soldiers in the field, perhaps the time is indeed ripe to respond to God’s call on us to work together more closely in this field which is “white for harvest”¹³. Then, together, we can encourage all our serving military to act as “salt and light”¹⁴ and to impact their nations for good and for God. This is AMCF’s aim, the goal of the PSOs and I believe it is the desire of AMI^{15, 16}.

So, thank you again for this opportunity to share the purpose, aims and work of AMCF and MMI. Let’s learn to pray together, and act together practically, to support the sailors, soldiers and airmen currently on the spiritual front line. Above all, as we do, let us remember that “He has called us, and he is faithful”¹⁷ for “we are all one in Jesus Christ”¹⁸. Amen.

¹² John 17: 11, 21, 23

¹³ Matthew 9:37-38

¹⁴ Matthew 5:13-16

¹⁵ Maj Gen Oscar Rabena noted AMI’s desire to strengthen the Catholic Soldier as: a Servant of God; a Spiritual Warrior; an Evangeliser; a Peacemaker; a Man of Values, in: “The Christian Soldier in the Service of Just Peace” AMI anniversary publication 1965-2015, page 47.

¹⁶ The desired characteristics of a Catholic Soldier are given in the Declaration of the AMI General Assembly 15 November 2000 in Rome, “The Catholic Soldier at the Beginning of the third Millennium” in: “The Christian Soldier in the Service of Just Peace” AMI anniversary Publication 1965-2015, pages 65-66.

¹⁷ 1 Thessalonians 5:24

¹⁸ Galatians 3:28