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Chaplains Graduate Basic Leadership Course

By Naval Education and Training Command and Naval Chaplaincy School and Center Public Affairs

FORT JACKSON, S.C. - Twenty-one chaplains graduated from the Basic Leadership Course (BLC) at the Naval Chaplaincy School and Center (NCSC) in Ft. Jackson Dec. 8.

The class was comprised of 19 active duty and 2 reserve chaplains preparing for ministry to the sea services and their families.

"This class exemplifies the broad range of experienced religious ministry professionals that answer the call to care for Sailors, Marines and coastguardsmen," said Capt. Mark W. Smith, NCSC commanding officer "They have risen to answer that call as a team more united and dedicated than they may have dreamed they could. I am pleased to say they will serve our nation's forces with distinction. "

Deputy Chief of Chaplains Rear Adm. Scott W. Brent was the guest speaker.

"Courage is to push past what is familiar and comfortable to touch humanity with a purpose greater than yourself," said Brent during his address to the graduates and their families.

The BLC is conducted three times a year and is designed to give entry-level chaplains an understanding of the role of a professional naval chaplain within institutional ministry. The training is comprised of four weeks of the Naval Chaplains Basic Course (NCBC), one week of Religious Ministry Team Expeditionary Course (RMTEX) and two weeks of Tools, Empowerment and Ministry (TEAMS).

"Graduation day is the culmination of God's work for the last 14 years of my life," said Lt. j.g. Jose Monzon, from the Seventh Day Adventist Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, Michigan. He is headed to Naval Base Kitsap, in Bangor, Washington as a staff chaplain.

For practical and hands on experience, students are taken to heavily concentrated fleet areas. "The field trips to Norfolk and Parris Island, South Carolina made me fall in love with the work of a chaplain and the chaplain corps all over again," said Monzon.

Graduation from the course is a requirement for new Navy chaplains before they go to assignments around the world. Lt. Cmdr. Leroy Young, an instructor at NCSC explained there are four core capabilities emphasized in the course.

"The first is to 'provide' for our own with our religious organization, 'facilitate' other religious faith groups, 'advising' our commanders on religious, moral, and ethical matters, and 'care' for all," said Young. "We teach chaplains how to balance both sides of their collar - as a minister operating in a pluralistic environment while representing their own faith traditions and as a Naval officer to better understand the institution and culture of the Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard."

Lt. j.g. Mercedes Speller is a Southern Baptist chaplain heading to Chaplains Religious Enrichment Development Operation (CREDO) at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina as a staff chaplain. She completed a bachelor's degree in political science at Hampton University in Norfolk and a Master's in divinity from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

"I wanted to be a Navy chaplain because I told the Lord I would serve Him and take care of His people wherever He sends me, and He sent me to the Navy," said Speller. "I have such an overwhelming feeling of gratitude and pride because of all that my classmates and I were able to accomplish within the past seven weeks.

"Chaplain School has been the most intense, challenging, and fun experience I have ever had. I've done things here I never dreamed I would do with some of the finest ministers I have ever met. I love this institutional ministry and my colleagues," said Speller. "I have absolutely made the right decision."

For more news from the Chaplain Corps, visit
<http://www.navy.mil/local/crb/>.

For information about the Naval Chaplaincy School and Center, visit
<https://www.netc.navy.mil/centers/chaplain/>.

For additional information on the Naval Education and Training Command, visit the NETC website: <https://www.netc.navy.mil>.

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