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## **Naval Chaplaincy School and Center's latest RP A School graduates ready for the fleet**

COLUMBIA, S.C. – The newest class of Religious Program Specialists (RPs) graduated from the Naval Chaplaincy School and Center (NCSC) at Fort Jackson, Oct. 10.

Senior Chief Religious Program Specialist Scott Shields, NCSC's Senior Enlisted Leader (SEL), described this group of 15 new RPs as vital members of the Religious Ministry Team (RMT), and instrumental in helping facilitate Command Religious Programs.

"RPs graduate with a diverse set of administrative, technical and logistical skills necessary to carry out religious programs and services in the fleet and around the world," he said.

Shields also served as the guest speaker for the graduation ceremony and explained that he believes vigilance and faith portray the aptitude and character each RP should always maintain.

"The attribute of vigilance is the result of learned and practiced behaviors. Vigilance is discipline, a matter of self-control and awareness," said Shields.

"The other attribute is faith, not just about that trust and bond between man and God, but the trust forged between shipmates. At the end of the day, the saying 'I've got your back' is really about faith."

Shields also explained to the graduates that as RPs, their faith and vigilance would be tested daily.

"It has been my responsibility to ensure that you have been provided all of the opportunities possible to sharpen your vigilance and strengthen your faith," He added. "Take what you have experienced so far and apply it to your everyday lives. Your vigilance and faith may prevent tragedy, but it will also guide you and your shipmates even in the darkest of hours."

Religious Program Specialist Seaman Apprentice Mauricio Melo, a native of Cali, Columbia, and the RP 'A' School honor graduate, said his training has reinforced the importance of living with integrity.

"One thing that stood out to me among all others during my training is how important it is for RPs to be trustworthy," said Melo. "Confidentiality is very important in my part of the RMT. My next duty station is a medical center where I plan on using the skills that I received and developed during 'A' School."

Religious Program Specialist Seaman Recruit Colton Gross noted how he has grown as Sailor with a better understanding of how the fleet works.

"My instructors have been helping me get ready for my next duty station, Camp Lejeune, Second Marine Division. I have grown to understand my role within the RMT and look forward to serving with Marines," he said. "The

class on suicide prevention was powerful. Two people that I knew pretty-well died by suicide. Now, I have a better understanding of how to respond to others who are in need of help fleet-wide."

The students of the RP 'A' School have been under the guidance of Captain Mark Smith, a Navy chaplain, and NCSC's commanding officer.

"They have been challenged to have a lifelong commitment to professional curiosity, a strong sense of honor in the special role they have pledged to have in the Navy, and to always remember that it is to the sea that the Navy has been sent," said Smith. "Religious ministry has a long history of going over the horizon in support of the spiritual wholeness of Sailors - these Sailors add that calling to their pledge to serve in the long maritime heritage and proud accomplishments of the United States Navy."

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 more news from Naval Education and Training Command, visit [www.navy.mil/local/cnet/](http://www.navy.mil/local/cnet/).

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Story by Lt. Cmdr. Troy Todd, Naval Chaplaincy School and Center Public Affairs

