



ARCHDIOCESE FOR THE MILITARY SERVICES, USA

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Father Marcel Taillon Named Interim Vocations Director of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA

Tasked with relieving chronic shortage of Catholic military chaplains



Father Marcel Taillon

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA (AMS), will soon have a new interim Director of Vocations. He is Father Marcel Taillon, a priest of the Diocese of Providence, RI. Fr. Taillon starts his new ministry on April 15. He succeeds Father S. Matthew Gray, Ch, Capt., USAF, who was recently called back to his home Diocese of Charleston, SC, following two years as AMS Vocations Director, and is now deployed in the Middle East with the South Carolina Air National Guard.

Father Taillon, 58, is well suited for the position with experience as a vocation director and recruiter in his home Diocese of Providence, and director of spiritual formation at Our Lady of Providence Seminary. For the past 17 years he has served as pastor of St. Thomas More Parish in Narragansett RI, which counts among its membership, servicemen and women from the nearby Naval Station in Newport. Father Taillon is a chaplain for the Narragansett Police and Fire Departments and the South Kingstown Police Department. He is a longtime program host on Relevant Radio, helping pursue its mission “to bring Christ to the world through the media.”

As AMS Vocations Director, Father Taillon will be in charge of shepherding young men expressing an interest in the priesthood and U.S. Military chaplaincy through the process of discernment and formation. He welcomes the opportunity. "I feel called to it," he said. "I have a great passion for seminarians, for priesthood. I love the priesthood. I love our country and those who serve our country and are willing to sacrifice every day, in and out of harm's way."

In announcing the appointment, His Excellency, the Most Reverend Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D., Archbishop for the Military Services said: "I am so pleased to have a priest with Father Taillon's experience in this very important role for the Archdiocese. He will bring many gifts to the task. I am also very grateful to Bishop Henning for releasing him for this ministry. In a time when priests are low density and in high demand, I know that his absence from the Providence Diocese represents a sacrifice."

Father Taillon will have his work cut out for him. The U.S. Military continues to suffer a chronic shortage of Catholic chaplains as aging priests retire from all branches faster than they can be replaced. Over the past 25 years, the number of active-duty Catholic chaplains has declined by more than half, from over 400 at the time of 9/11 to 190 today, serving an active-duty Catholic population of some 325,000 based worldwide, not counting their families. While 25 percent of the U.S. Military is Catholic, Catholic priests make up only about seven percent of the chaplains corps.

Fortunately, through the hard work of Father Taillon's predecessors, the AMS has seen a sharp increase over the past 15 years in young men completing formation to become priest-chaplains through the Co-Sponsored Seminarian Program, a vocations support partnership between the AMS and cooperating U.S. dioceses and religious communities. Many new priests and chaplains have come through the program and 34 are currently enrolled, up from just seven in 2008. Father Taillon will serve as their primary AMS contact, mentor, and spiritual counselor.

"I think the Lord always sort of prepares all of us, whatever we do in life," Father Taillon said. "He prepares us to serve him at the next step so I feel like I'm at least prepared. I have a lot to learn but I do feel ready to go and support our vocations." He says the one of the greatest attractions for young men to become priests and chaplains is the example of those currently enrolled as co-sponsored seminarians. "I know one thing that's for certain," he said. "Everyone tells me that the quality of the seminarians who are co-sponsored is amazing. Seminary staffs I know, and other priests who have met them, say they're just incredible men of great quality and integrity with a zeal to do what they know they're getting ready to do. Hopefully their witness and their meeting other people inspires other men to come forward and be open to the ministry."

A cradle Catholic born in Woonsocket, RI, once known as "the most French city in the United States," Father Taillon began to discern his own vocation in his 20s while traveling the country as a pharmacy operations analyst for CVS. He was ordained a priest in Providence on Sept. 1, 1994, following five years of formational study at the Pontifical North American College in Rome. Fluent in French and Italian, Father Taillon holds a Degree of Sacred Theology (S.T.B.) from the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas ("the Angelicum"), a Licentiate in Moral Theology from the Pontifical University of St. John Lateran, and an undergraduate degree in Philosophy and the Humanities from Providence College.