



Supporting Returning War Veterans

"The road home from war is longer, steeper and often more challenging than the road to war for most soldiers and their families. ...Yellow ribbons are nice and much appreciated. Love, support and a 'cup of cold water', however, is the incarnational gift of Christ, through His Church, to the combat veteran and family." These words were written by Major John Morris who served as a military chaplain in Iraq and started the program, *Beyond the Yellow Ribbon*. John believes churches can be a helpful partner in the readjustment process. Here are some ways to support the veterans and their families in your parish:

1. **Make your parish "military friendly"** by acknowledging, publicly, parishioners who are in the military and how their service is appreciated. Post photos on the bulletin board and organize prayer teams.
2. **Reach out to military families** during separations. Pastoral calls and practical help, like changing the oil in the family vehicle or raking leaves, will alleviate stress when a family member is gone. Teachers and youth ministers may make a special effort to reach out to children who feel the trauma of separation from a parent.
3. **Reach out to deployed soldiers.** Send the weekly parish bulletin, handwritten notes, and care packages to let them know they are not forgotten.
4. **When a soldier comes home, welcome them.** Acknowledging the sacrifice both the vet and their family have made will validate their shared struggle and affirm their service. Separate your feelings about war from your treatment of the vet.
5. **Support beyond the yellow ribbon.** Treat the service member and their family as if they have just survived a fire. It will take a long time for the family and soldier to rebuild their lives after the fire of war. With the help of their church, over time, the family can grow into a new normal. Provide meals, offer to babysit, or pay for the couple to attend a marriage retreat.
6. **Be alert for signs of distress.** Don't assume if a soldier and their family attend Sunday Mass regularly that everything is going well with reintegration. Check in with them periodically and watch for signs of depression, hyper vigilance, withdrawal, inability to hold a job, and/or anger. Children may be the first to reflect the stress that is happening at home. Pay attention to what they say and do. Express concern and refer to community resources as needed.

Resources:

Welcome Them Home - Help Them Heal: Pastoral Care and Ministry with Service

Returning from the War Zone: A Guide for Families of Military Members.

Check for resources for Returning War Veterans and Families:

National Resource Directory for wounded warriors and their families <https://www.nrd.gov/>

Point Man International Ministries <http://pmim.org/ptsd.html>

Veterans Affairs National Center for PTSD <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/>

National Amputation Foundation <http://www.nationalamputation.org/>

Paralyzed Veterans of America <http://www.pva.org/site/PageServer>

Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA <https://www.facebook.com/milarchusa>