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# Frontline Faith

## Catholic Content for Sacrament-Starved Troops

BY STEVE WEATHERBE, REGISTER CORRESPONDENT 09/05/2010 Comments (7)

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Lance Cpl. James Harris, with the 2nd Battalion 2nd Marines from Camp Lejeune, N.C., is silhouetted at dawn during an operation in the Garmsir district of Helmand Province, Afghanistan, Dec. 23.

When radio-show host Cheri Lomonte heard that some American Catholic troops went months without the Eucharist, she was not only appalled — she was energized.

"I just couldn't believe, at this crucial time, they wouldn't have a priest," said Lomonte, who hosts "Mary's Touch," heard on more than 80 stations in the U.S. "There are over 300,000 Catholics serving in the U.S. armed forces and just 280 chaplains. Some of them, especially those serving in the field, have little to no access to a priest, the sacraments or even the understanding and support of fellow Catholics."

Putting her media smarts and contacts to work, the Lakeway, Texas, mother of six put together a package

of Catholic programming for MP3 players that soldiers could carry with them. She launched an organization, Frontline Faith, to raise funds and produced the first run of 1,000 MP3 players to go into the hands of Catholics in hospitals and those awaiting deployment.

Supporting her is the Archdiocese for the Military Services, which serves Catholic servicemen and women, their families and Catholic chaplains. Its archbishop, Timothy Broglio, is heard on the MP3 twice, celebrating Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., and, later in the program, preaching at the same place.

Partnering with Frontline Faith in distribution is the Our Lady of Lourdes Hospitality North American Volunteers, which assists Catholic pilgrims, including wounded or disabled military personnel, in traveling to Lourdes, France.

### Strong Marian Flavor

There is a strong Marian flavor to the enterprise: "Mary's Touch," the radio program, features interviews with people discussing the intercession of Mary in their lives. Frontline Faith continues the tradition with 11 stories of American combatants aided in their travails over the years by the Mother of God.

Theologian Marcellino D'Ambrosio, for example, recounts how his father ditched his B-24 in the English Channel after a mission over Berlin in the Second World War, staying afloat several minutes beyond expectations — long enough for his father to escape into an inflatable dinghy after his prayer to Mary.

The MP3 player also contains nine thank-you letters from students at the Cathedral School of St. Mary in Austin, Texas; a sermon preached by Bishop Fulton Sheen to soldiers of an earlier era urging them to be "centurions of Rome"; a sermon from Father Larry Richards on the meaning of the Mass; the Sorrowful Mysteries prayed aloud, and several hymns and



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meditations.

Lomonte reports that she has already received 3,000 requests for the MP3 players and is busy raising the funds to expand the project. Each player costs \$24. Distribution will be handled by chaplains.

### Strong Faith Helps Ease Stress

There is no question, says one expert on post-traumatic stress syndrome, that a strong faith will help deal with the stress of combat.

"The trauma of war bends people out of shape," said Dr. Frank Ochberg, a Fulbright Scholar and recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies. "The adrenaline rush, the horrible images, the closest of friends destroyed in your presence. It helps you deal with these horrifying experiences if you have something to cling to: symbols, ideas, images."

Ochberg says that while religious faith is an asset for soldiers facing severe stress, he warns against preaching to the unconverted. "They don't want to be pushing a point of view at people at a particularly vulnerable time for them."

### Chaplain Shortage

But as Christine Rodda, a spokeswoman for the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, says, "We have no problem with what Frontline Faith is doing, because they are only reaching out to Catholics." Rodda says it is generally known that there is a shortage of Catholic chaplains "and a lot of Catholics without access to priests and the sacraments."

Rodda's organization has never had a complaint about Catholic proselytizing, but has fielded "thousands" of calls from Catholics complaining about fundamentalist Protestant chaplains proselytizing them.

Rodda says Catholics should push for the Armed Forces Network to broadcast a Mass each Sunday; it shows four fundamentalist Protestant programs and no Catholic ones.

In the meantime, Frontline Faith's MP3 players can help fill a void.

*Steve Weatherbe writes from Victoria, British Columbia.*

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## Comments

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Posted by Bernadette Gress-Masi on Sunday, Sep 5, 2010 12:03 PM (EDT):

Dear Cheri Lomonte,

Thank-you so much for this informative article and many blessings to you for putting your concerns into action...this is the heart of our faith...to share with those who have not, to bring Christ to others through His most holy and splendid Mother...they and the Trinity truly are the light of the world...please continue , Cheri, in your mission of love...

God bless you,  
Bernadette Gress-Masi

Posted by WUNSCH on Sunday, Sep 5, 2010 2:51 PM (EDT):

Maybe the Armed Forces Network could pick up an EWTN feed?

Posted by Patricia on Monday, Sep 6, 2010 1:26 AM (EDT):

With my grandson planning to join the Marines, the report of so few Catholic Chaplains to serve the catholic

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Ana Yvette Parroquia Sa Michael



Help us bring the Truth of the Gospel to more Catholics!

military personnel is disheartening. I have to admit the anger I feel with the discrimination against catholics serving our country. Is the military anti-catholic? Why would they allow fundamentalists and protestants to try to convert our catholic military men and women, and not even provide catholic media feed to the catholics? Isn't religious freedom a basic tenet of our democratic form of government that they are fighting for? Thank you so much for making this known and working so diligently to change this. God bless your efforts and I will spread the word wherever I can about you and what you are doing. If there is anything I can do beyond this, please contact me. Be assured of many prayers for the success of this mission. P.S. An EWTN feed is a great idea.

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Posted by T. Loos on Wednesday, Sep 8, 2010 6:05 AM (EDT):

Sad, when so many priest live a plush life, apartments, houses, big cars, and bishops and cardinals that live like kings. All they can do at home is "claim their helping the poor, working for "social justice" and a lot of other socialist B.S.

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Posted by James Patrick on Wednesday, Sep 8, 2010 8:14 AM (EDT):

Google the Armed Forces Network and go to Viewer Feedback and let them know that this 'oversight' of no Catholic-oriented broadcasts on Sunday, is unacceptable!

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Posted by Patricia on Wednesday, Sep 8, 2010 11:28 PM (EDT):

T. Loos It is sad that more priests are not available to serve our catholic military personnel. But I don't believe it is because they have a plush life because they don't, not the priests I know. It is just the opposite. Cardinals and bishops living like kings is a far cry from reality. Some TV evangelists might fit that description. I can testify to the daily sacrifices the priests that I know make of time and stuff, even skipping meals to tend to their pastoral duties, on call 24/7. Cardinals and bishops follow the same path, with even more responsibilities. I'm sure there are some who don't follow this holy way of life, but just as in the sex abuse scandal, the numbers are few. I pray that our shepherds will be in communion with the Holy Father in heart and mind, grow in holiness, and to have the courage and zeal to remain faithful to Christ and His Church. We all need these graces. God bless you.

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Posted by James Trear on Thursday, Sep 9, 2010 10:48 AM (EDT):

<http://myafn.dodmedia.osd.mil/Email.aspx> will let you tell the Armed Forces Network that the lack of a Catholic Mass for our troops is unacceptable! They responded to my email immediately. Their only broadcast that is Catholic is "The Pure Life" by Jason Everett. I told them that this will not satisfy the Sacramental needs of Catholics on Sunday. I also told them that protestant services are deficient theologically for Catholics, unless the purpose is to proselytize. I also suggested EWTN as an answer to this dilemma. I am awaiting a response from Chaplain (Maj.) Deppmeier.

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