

# My Path is Set

September 14, 2007

Since college, where I submitted my life to the lordship of Christ, I had sensed the Lord pointing me toward the professional ministry. The problem was I didn't have any specific sense of direction. I looked into a church planting opportunity in China, but that door had no sooner cracked open than it slammed shut. Although the next step seemed straightforward – apply to seminary – I did so not knowing what kind of ministry my skills and gifts would best serve. It was clear that God had other plans in mind for me. But what?

The broad diversity of students and faculty at Michigan Theological Seminary helped to provide the answer. Here I met students who had served in the military, and I particularly remember a couple of early conversations we shared. They told the familiar stories: they joined the service to try to get some direction or some discipline, in their lives. But after enlisting they quickly learned that the military provided no haven from the trouble with alcohol, drugs, women, and other ills which plagued them in civilian life. These fellow students shared how they sensed the real need for spiritual guidance and discipline in addition to their duty-day military discipline. The Spirit began to pique my interest in the chaplaincy.

I thought back to what it was that had originally attracted me to missionary work. Missionaries went to where the needs were, lived with the people, learned their language, and got to know them. It's the old idea of "incarnational ministry," to live with and become like the people you're trying to reach. It dawned on me that building relationships with people and becoming part of their community was a more natural style of ministry for me.

The "missionary mindset" I had adopted also seemed to fit the military chaplaincy. I would go where the troops were, dress in the same uniform, and wear the same high-and-tight haircut. It would mean learning their language, becoming part of their community and sharing their culture. I soon realized this would give me an opportunity to engage in another form of incarnational ministry. Having never met anyone who was taking that path, I began to think the military chaplaincy might be a real possibility.

When the terrorists attacked on September 11, 2001, the final piece fell into place: our nation needed defending. I called the recruiters. A year later, as I was completing my final semester at MTS, I received my acceptance letter to the Army Chaplain Candidate Program, along with my commission orders as a Second Lieutenant. Clearly, the Lord was using my experiences and the people I knew at Michigan Theological Seminary to set me on the path to full-time ministry in the United States Army Chaplaincy.