

HUMANIST CHAPLAINS IN THE CAF

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1. Why do we need humanist chaplains?

Regardless of their SFT, chaplains serve all members. On some occasions, members request services from a specific SFT. When this occurs, they are referred to a chaplain of that tradition.



Therefore, a chaplain serves all members, but is equally a SME in their own tradition. Consequently, representation and diversity is important.

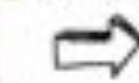
In 2021, the SFT groups represented within the chaplaincy were Christian, Muslim, Jewish, as well as Sikh, Buddhist, and Unitarian-Universalist (candidates currently in training).



However, as identified in the 2021 Review of the Royal Canadian Chaplain Service, 39% of CAF members surveyed have no religious affiliation. Although they were receiving chaplain services from all chaplains, at the time there was no chaplain to represent them. The review confirmed that the integration of humanist chaplains was a way forward towards inclusion and diversity.



Although that review was based on a small number of participants, the results are in line with Statistics Canada results for 2021 in the general population.



2. What is humanism?

Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life based on a profound respect for human dignity and the conviction that human beings are ultimately accountable to themselves and to society for their actions. It is a secular worldview (it is based on humanity, not religion) that affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical and meaningful lives. Source: HC



Humanism

affirms the worth, dignity and autonomy of the individual and the rights of every human being, combined with social responsibility.



aims at the maximum possible fulfillment through the cultivation of ethical, creative living and rational means of addressing the challenges of our time.



is based on the method of reason and science, guided by human rights and values, without faith or dogma.

3. How did humanist chaplains become a reality?



All chaplains have to be endorsed by an SFT. HC signed in Nov 2021 a memorandum of understanding with the ICCMC in order to be able to endorse humanist candidates.



In May 2022, Capt Marie-Claire Khadij, who had been a Christian Chaplain since 2017, became the first military humanist chaplain in the Americas, making Canada only the 4th country to have military humanist chaplains.



* The Australian Navy has Maritime Spiritual Wellbeing Officers since 2020, but they are not part of the chaplaincy.



The SFT identifier for humanist chaplains is the international humanist symbol, the "Happy Human".



4. How was the welcoming of a humanist chaplains received by members?

Upon her endorsement, Capt Khadij received hundreds of congratulatory messages from CAF members from all ranks and across Canada, and even from deployed members.



"Just a quick note to let you know how much I enjoyed your '60 seconds' clip on being the CAF's first humanist chaplain. Your references to values, meaning, purpose, and contributing to building an ethical society really resonated with me."



"I'm very happy to see that we're finally being recognized in the CAF. Having someone representing us adds legitimacy to secular and scientific ethics."



"Is it you? Is it you the new humanist chaplain? We came to see you as soon as we heard. We are atheists and we are so happy! This is amazing!"

5. How was the arrival of a humanist in the RCCHS received by chaplains?



Each time the RCCHS integrates a new SFT, there are some challenges that become opportunities of growth towards better inclusivity. As it was shown in the Netherlands, the integration of humanist chaplains, as their society secularized, was an important contribution to keep their chaplaincy relevant. As Canada becomes an increasingly pluralistic country, the recent welcoming of humanist chaplains, as well as Buddhist, Sikh and Unitarian-Universalist, strengthens the RCCHS and contributes to the overall spiritual well-being of CAF members and their families.

6. Should humanist chaplains replace religious chaplains?



Not 62% of CAF member have a religious affiliation that is a source of resilience. Having their religious needs met is essential. Furthermore, depending on the operations, having a variety of SFT SME's is a strength. However, each chaplain, no matter their SFT, has to be committed to truly care for all members and respect them for who they are.

Acronyms

HAA: Humanists, atheists, agnostics and secular worldviews.
RCCHS: Royal Canadian Chaplain Service
SFT: Spiritual and Faith Traditions
HC: Humanist Canada
SME: Subject Matter Expert
ICCMC: Interfaith Committee on Canadian Military Chaplaincy
SEELM: Subsidized Education for Entry Level Masters

7. How can a non-religious person be a chaplain?



The Canadian Army Integrated Performance Strategy states that "Spirituality guides the way we understand our life journey, its path and its practices. It gives meaning and purpose to our lives, and is often expressed or experienced through religion, philosophy, or a rule of life. It is central to the development of moral character, values and beliefs, and is intrinsic to how we experience self, others, and community."

According to this definition, spirituality goes beyond religion and is an integral part of each human's life, including the ones of HAA+ members. Therefore, it is also important that they are represented within the RCCHS.

8. Are there currently applicants to become humanist chaplains?

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Various potential candidates are already being trained by HC in the hopes of being accepted in the CAF for direct entry or for the SEELM program, of which 50% are women. It is interesting to note that other military humanist chaplaincies around the world attract more women than the main SFT. Furthermore, 50% of the candidates are Francophones who are bilingual.

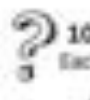
9. What is required to become a humanist chaplain?

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A Masters of Divinity or equivalent is needed to become a chaplain. Currently humanist candidates have degrees in, or are seeking studies in counseling, spiritual care, religious studies, and similar masters.



Human dignity and individual autonomy are core values of humanism.



10. What else do humanist chaplains bring to the CAF?
Each SFT brings its own contributions to the wellbeing of CAF members. The following are some that humanist chaplains contribute (note that not all of these are exclusive to the humanist tradition).



Humanist chaplains journey with military members whose loved ones may be seeking MAID and are able to be at the bedside of the person passing away if requested.

Humanist chaplains are also at ease supporting members who may be seeking an abortion.



Human rights are at the core of humanism. Humanist chaplains strive to be involved in CAF committees and initiatives working towards better inclusivity and fighting discrimination.



Humanist chaplains strive with their actions to work towards reconciliation with Indigenous members, and do their best to help others on this journey.



Humanist chaplains affirm the 2SLGBTQIA+ members and strive to be allies.

Humanist chaplains work in close collaboration with other non-monothestic traditions in the RCCHS to assist in creating more inclusive policies.



Li Yuba
Buddhist chaplain



Li McKay
Unitarian/Universalist chaplain

Humanist chaplains can offer a variety of non-religious ceremonies. All are inclusive and celebrate simultaneously the common humanity and the uniqueness of those present.



11. Do humanist chaplains pray?

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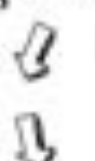
Humanist chaplains will always support the right of all CAF members who wish to pray and they will facilitate a space for them when needed. Themselves, they do not pray, as they do not believe in a higher power. They are however able to provide reflections during CAF events that are inclusive for all present, including HAA+ members.



Engage with your local chaplain to know what services are available for HAA+ members. You can ask for humanist resources to be available with the Bibles, Korans and Chumashim.

12. How can I help?

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Let other CAF members know that there are now humanist chaplains.



At CFB Gagetown, a humanist volunteering pilot program is already very successful in supporting local non-profit organisations. Why not start one in your area?



Find interested candidates to become humanist chaplains.

Follow us on social media and share:



fb.me/military.humanists



www.twitter.com/HumanistsMtl



www.humanistcanada.ca



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13. What does the future look like for humanist chaplains within the CAF?

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Humanist chaplains hope to grow their numbers in order to better represent HAA+ members in the CAF, and they look forward to continue working side by side with their colleagues of other SFT in order to provide the best services possible to all Defence Team members and their families.

