

## *Crossing the Brow: Thoughts on the Faces and Places of Ministry*

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You're excited about orders to shipboard duty. After all, that's why you joined the Navy. Go to sea, see the world, and help the Sailors you sail with to see the grace of God in their lives. But the excitement doesn't last long. During your "welcome aboard," the XO quickly shifts the topic from your pastoral experience to your shipboard experience—specifically to your experience with 3M, the Maintenance and Material Management System.

"Chaps, have you ever been through a yard period? What do you know about the Current Ships Maintenance Project (CSMP)?"

Welcome to the wonderful world of iron ships and black, steel-toed shoes—a world where ministry mingles with the mundane. There is no way to get around it, so you might as well get good at it.

I reported to USS ENTERPRISE (CVN 65) soon after it began a 12-month Extended Drydocking Selected Restricted Availability (EDSRA). This is my second ship and my second time in the yards, so I had some experience. But it had been 10 years between ships, and my previous command allowed me to "rent" space instead of owning it, which meant that I didn't know very much about material readiness. I knew how hard the shipyard is on crew morale. After all, it's like living in your home while it's being rebuilt. But I didn't know very much about space maintenance. Since I hadn't "owned" any spaces, I had left that to the professionals.

What do I mean by "owning" versus "renting"?

It is possible to "rent" space in the Navy. You are the tenant, but someone else is the landlord and responsible for the maintenance. There are advantages to "renting":

- You are free to focus on your primary mission where you are the resident expert;
- Secondary functions (like maintenance) fall to the other experts;

- You will never put the command at risk by failing a 3M inspection;
- When something goes wrong, it's not your problem.

All of the arguments for renting a home or apartment apply to renting space in the command. But there are also advantages to owning. When you "own":

- You pay your own way and earn the respect of your peers;
- Secondary functions and collateral duties can actually open new doors and broaden ministry, rather than impede it;
- You have a stake in the community, and the community knows it.

Of course, you may not have a choice. Even if you would like to rent, the command may require you to own the program.

On ENTERPRISE, the Religious Ministries Department owns its spaces. That means that we are not only responsible for the ministry that takes place, we are also responsible for the place that ministry takes. During this EDSRA, we have to care for the spaces as well as the faces. Sometimes, it seems like we care too much about the



*RP2 Kimesa Gatling enters a work candidate in OMMS-NG (Organizational Maintenance Management System - Next Generation); the job will be screened by the ship's Maintenance Department and AIRLANT before it is added to the CSMP.*

spaces. One evening in the middle of the yard period, my 10-year-old daughter said, “Dad, what do you do all day? When you were at the chapel, I knew what you did. You preached and taught and talked to people. What do you do on the ship?”

That day I had counseled a few Sailors. But much of my day was spent reviewing the CSMP, meeting with contractors, overseeing work, identifying additional work candidates and attending a weekly EDSRA progress meeting—not the type of ministry that my daughter understands or that I enjoy. But it was an important part of the bigger picture that includes the faces *and* the places for ministry.

My predecessors planned to build a better place for ministry. It started three years ago when the Religious Ministries Department (RMD) identified a problem with the spaces and entered a job into the CSMP: “*The sound and heat levels in the offices, crew’s lounge/library and the chapel are too high.*” This is a chronic problem for gallery spaces (under the flight deck) on carriers, not limited to the RMD. Thanks to the great support of NAVSEASYS COM and the Chief of Chaplains, the work eventually was scheduled for this EDSRA. We are now overseeing \$775K worth of contract work to lower sound levels and improve the heat-



*Chaplain Mike Reckling speaks with a Sailor aboard ENTERPRISE.*

ing and cooling in our spaces. We hope to reduce noise levels by 15 decibels.

What does this have to do with ministry? Everything! If the offices (underneath the “4 Wire”) are quieter, we may actually be able to “hear” confessions. And the preacher might still raise his voice in the chapel—underneath the waist catapult—but

only to make a point, not just to be heard over the roar of a launch. Sailors may be able to take a break and watch TV in the crew’s lounge, or to read in a comfortable library. Why? Because several successive Religious Ministry Teams have made it their business to get this work done, rather than just complaining about the noise in the neighborhood.

As a chaplain, you may not like this aspect of the job. After all, you didn’t learn it in seminary. However, it is listed in the functions and tasks for Religious Ministry Teams. It is an important part of the bigger picture of ministry. If you just rent space, chances are that you will never make the investment in order to make the changes to build a better place for ministry.

Here are a few suggestions if you’re crossing the brow for the first (or second!) time:

- Learn about the ship and take ownership of your spaces. This includes basic qualification in Damage Control and 3M.
- Think about how your spaces affect ministry and/or make ministry more effective. Most commands want to improve services, if they can. You may not see the results, but those who follow you will. Owners invest in the future.
- Remember your ministry as a chaplain. All of these other things are means to an end, not an end in themselves. But they can help mobilize your ministry and promote an effective Command Religious Program.

I’m anxious to finish the work and get out of the yards. So are my 3,800 shipmates on ENTERPRISE. But most of all, I’m anxious to put our spaces to work and do what we were really sent here to do. We’re making preparations and anxiously waiting to hear those familiar words, “Underway, shift colors.”



*RPCM Dwyane Thompson performs a spot-check on a fire station in the RMD spaces following preventative maintenance.*