



## TEDS Alumnus of the Year 2005 COLONEL BRIAN R. VAN SICKLE (MDiv '79)

Chaplain (Colonel) Brian R. Van Sickle watched as planes flew in and out of the airbase in Afghanistan. Suddenly, word arrived that a team of Special Operations men had just been hit by one of their own bombs, which killed and wounded several of them. "I met with the victims and the men who carried the dead bodies out of the battlefield and helped them

through the critical incident," he recalls. "I wondered how I was going to help these guys who do this kind of work, picking up the remains of their fallen comrades. I thought to myself, 'I want to be a pastor who helps to make meaning of this.'"

As Command Chaplain and advisor to the Commander of the Pacific Air Forces (PACAF), Brian oversees the organization, execution, and evaluation of PACAF's religious programs, serving more than 45,000 personnel and their families with an annual religious program budget exceeding \$3 million. He is currently headquartered at Hickam Air Force Base in Hawaii.

### The Call to Discipleship

Brian was born on November 29, 1950, in Minot, North Dakota. In 1968 he entered the University of Minnesota, St. Cloud, as an economics major. When his education was interrupted by a U.S. Army draft to serve in Vietnam for two years, he was given an alternative. He could serve four years in the Air Force or Navy instead. "I wanted to serve, but not as an armed combatant," he says, so he enlisted in the United States Navy and served as a medic.

During his Navy years, Brian's faith was challenged. It was not that he questioned his Lutheran upbringing, but he says, "I searched for what was meaningful in my faith; I hungered for intimacy with Jesus Christ." A Navy buddy shared with him what they later dubbed "relationship theology"—a personal relationship with Jesus.

"One day in 1974, it all became clear to me—that's who Jesus is!" Brian recalls. "My friend helped put Christianity in perspective. As I re-embraced my spiritual roots, I knew that the answer was not in politics or war protests or economics but in the person and work of Jesus Christ on the cross." He unabashedly began to share Christ with those around him. "God brought a harvest; I had fun sharing my faith! It was then that I recognized the call to bring Christ into the military institution." Brian decided to become a military chaplain.

After receiving his Bachelor of Arts from Chapman College, California, in 1975, Brian joined the Navy Reserves and began his seminary search. He chose Trinity not only because of its reputation for solid biblical training but because it allowed him to live near Jean Dybdal, whom he married in July 1976.

At Trinity, Brian went on another journey that transformed him from being the "simple kid and least sophisticated seminarian on campus" to one equipped to divide the word of truth. He recalls the mentoring he received from those he considered spiritual giants at the divinity school, professors like Walt Kaiser, Kenneth Kantzer, Norm Geisler, Perry Downs, Carl Henry, and Cyril Carr. "In the end, I picked up the godly legacy of these men who transformed me. They loved God and engaged our contemporary culture.

They were who I wanted to emulate." He received his Master of Divinity degree from Trinity in May 1979.

From 1979 until 1982 Brian completed the Clinical Pastoral Education program and served as supervisor at St. Elisabeth Hospital in Washington, D.C., the largest federal psychiatric hospital. The experience shaped his pastoral identity and honed his supervisory and intervention skills; his vision to draw men and women in uniform to Jesus Christ became more focused. Ordained by the Evangelical Free Church of America, Van Sickle entered the active duty Air Force in 1982.

### A Life of Service

Throughout his twenty-three years as a military chaplain, Brian stayed true to his First Amendment mandate to facilitate and provide the free exercise of religion. "TEDS prepared me to share the gospel in contextually appropriate and effective ways," he says. As PACAF's "senior pastor," Van Sickle is intentional in ensuring that all of the faiths represented in the military have access to places, personnel, and programs to exercise and enjoy the freedom of worship mandated in the Constitution. Yet amid possible conflicts of interest that his position may present, Brian says his abiding faith in Jesus Christ has not wavered one iota: "In the chaplaincy, God's sovereignty is at work."

Brian considers maintaining accountability through regular fellowship with other believers to be one of the hardest challenges he has faced as a chaplain. He makes it a priority to meet regularly with other Christian military leaders for prayer, Bible study, and fellowship.

Another challenge is the long separation that all military families face. Brian's assignments with U.S. Special Operations Command caused him to spend twenty-three out of the last thirty months away from his wife, Jean, and three sons—Adam, Jordan, and Aaron. Brian attributes their successful marriage to the unconditional commitment that he and Jean have toward God and each other, the "prayer connection" they have when separated, and the conviction that they are partners in ministry.

For Brian, success is about changing lives through unselfish service to others—such as giving up a whole afternoon to help neighbors at Hickam AFB to pack up their household goods for a move, instead of unpacking his own. It's about taking a diverse group of chaplains and forming them into a dynamic team that can minister to the cadets at the Air Force Academy. It's about transforming Korean and American lives at Osan Air Base Chapel.

As a military chaplain, Col. Brian Van Sickle continues to do what he loves and is called to do—he serves and ministers to military men and women and their families with a zeal for God's glory and his glory alone.

**It is with great honor and pleasure that the TIU Alumni Association presents the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School 2005 Alumnus of the Year Award to Col. Brian R. Van Sickle, Chaplain, USAF.**

—Marie E. Moberg