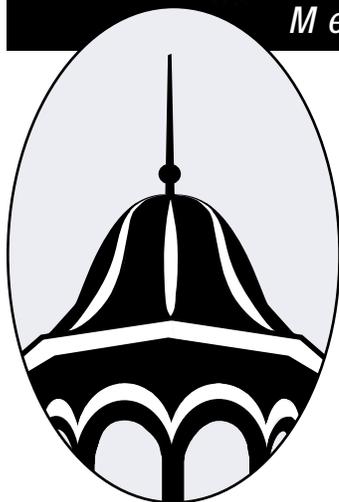


# The Bridge

Memphis, Tennessee

Harding  
University  
Graduate  
School of  
Religion

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## Ministering to Our Military Families

by Leanne Braddock and Dr. Michelle Mentzer

While most people were glued to the TV, radio and Internet consuming news of the war in Iraq, others were actively avoiding the daily onslaught of war news, attempting to maintain a "normal" life for themselves and their children. These are the families of the men and women serving in harm's way, who need our special prayers, care and attention. During the first few days of the war, some

military wives actually stopped answering the phone because people called to learn if a reported casualty was their spouse. (Don't do that!) Our intent is to suggest some practical ways in which you can minister to these families and so show God's love.

In peacetime, military life represents a unique challenge for service members and their families, and always with an element of danger. Airplanes crash,

weapons misfire and people die. For naval and marine families, life often revolves around deployment cycles that have a special rhythm of their own. Military families — adults and children alike — learn to adapt to these changes. The armed forces provide many excellent family support services, including pre- and post-deployment briefs, counseling services, financial aid

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U.S. Army Chaplain Gary Payne (M.Div., '90) baptizes a soldier in the Kuwaiti desert. U.S. Army Office of Public Affairs: 82nd Airborne Division. Reprinted from *The Christian Chronicle* Vol. 60., No. 4 (April 2003), p. 1.

## Noteworthyies

Dr. Bill Flatt, professor of counseling and former Graduate School dean, received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Tennessee Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (TAMFT) at its state convention in Nashville on March 1. A charter member of the TAMFT, Flatt was cited for his service as officer and consultant. He was also instrumental in passing the first certification law for marriage and family therapists in Tennessee (later upgraded to a licensure law). As dean, Flatt led to the establishment of the master of arts in counseling degree program, which meets licensure requirements for marriage and family therapy.

On March 28, Ruth Herring received an award for exceptional service and contributions to Harding University through Associated Women for Harding, the Memphis Chapter. Herring has been with the Graduate School for 33 years, currently as administrative assistant to the registrar.

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## From the Dean



### Decisions

As another semester closes, students are spending much more time in the library and on the computer. After struggling with the selection of a term paper topic, they now search for answers to questions about biblical texts, doctrinal issues, or a host of challenges in ministry. The research needs to lead to some conclusion in the term paper or thesis. Doctor of ministry candidates defend their dissertations on topics like assimilating new members or starting new evangelistic churches.

Deciding which class to take in the summer or fall semester can also be a challenge. The decision to get a job and go to school part time or stay in school full time determines how soon they start paying off student loans from their undergraduate program. On the other hand, several students weigh the implications of quitting a full-time job and moving to Memphis to study full time. By the second or third semester, the question of which degree (master of arts, master of arts in Christian ministry, or master of divinity) leads to considerable discussion with the dean, academic adviser and spouse. A whole new cohort of prospective students tries to decide whether to begin graduate education this summer or fall, while others are still not sure whether graduate education is what they really need. Still others feel a sense of relief that the decision has been made and they are on their way to Memphis.

Decision-making reaches far beyond the library and classrooms. Students are making plans for ministry. Some are looking for a place to preach or serve as a youth minister. Others are thinking about campus ministry. In the past few months, students made decisions to go to China, Africa, South America and

Scotland as missionaries.

The quality of these decisions flows out of one common commitment: an immersion into Christ. The willingness to commit a life to service precedes all these decisions. In a recent revisit of Michael Green's *Evangelism in the Early Church*, I was reminded of how different the conversion process was for Christians in the first century compared to the expectations of their Greco-Roman culture. The prevailing worldview did not regard belief as necessary for participation in the cult, or ethics as a part of religion, or make exclusive claims like those made in Christ.

In *To Tell the Truth* Will Metzger claims that there is no such thing as a half Christian. How can one be baptized, he asks, and not accept Christ as Lord or continue to live a carnal life? He poses a challenging question to preachers and church leaders: "How can we guard against cheap grace and mere intellectual assent with little evidence of a changed life?" Making decisions that transform the whole person is part of his answer. These are the kinds of decisions I see our students make all the time.

Every student shares a high level of commitment to make sacrifices now for future service or to enhance the ministry that demands so much of their time and energy right now. The level of study and sacrifice cannot help but raise our appreciation for all those who take service as seriously as these students do each semester. Continue to pray for the decisions they make and service they will render to the glory of God.

— Everett W. Huffard  
([dean@hugsr.edu](mailto:dean@hugsr.edu))

Dr. David Burks, president of Harding University, announced a new administrative position during the Graduate School of Religion Advancement Council meeting March 6. A vice president will be appointed to administer the operation of the Memphis campus and raise additional funds. Huffard will continue as dean and will teach two courses a semester in the areas of missions, church growth and leadership. According to Huffard, "This will take the Graduate School to a new level of effectiveness and service."

## Ministering *continued from page 1*

programs, recreational activities, and spouse support programs. Every naval command has an “ombudsman,” another Navy spouse who acts as the advocate for command family members. In the Marine Corps, families stay connected during deployments through the “Key Volunteer Network,” which ensures that every family gets a phone call every week or two from another Marine Corps spouse. Although these programs help, nothing quite takes the place of the love, care and personal attention that a relative, friend or neighbor can provide.

The adage “actions speak louder than words” is the key. Instead of saying, “Call me if you need anything,” just *do* something. The spouses likely won’t call, either because they don’t think they need anything, or they are too busy coping with each day to call. Bake a cake. Fix a meal and take it to the house. Offer to baby-sit so the spouse can shop or just go out for a day (be specific about dates and times). Take the spouse out for coffee or lunch. A few days after the war began, a friend of Michelle’s showed up at her door with his six-year-old son and said, “We’re going to mow your lawn and weed your flower beds,” an action gratefully accepted. Leanne’s mother, a Navy wife for 24 years, recalled that church leaders in Norfolk, Va., assembled a list of people who could fix things, from TV sets and washers to cars and lawn mowers. Families could call them when spouses were deployed.

Don’t forget the children, who need special remembering when their parents are deployed. Children don’t often have the words to express what they feel, and some are angry with their parents for abandoning them. For young children, three months may seem like three years. Others may appear nonchalant about their parent’s absence while harboring fears for Dad or Mom’s safety. Invite these children to play with your children or grandchildren. Be a surrogate parent/grandparent for the day. Invite them to bake cookies, go fishing, fly a kite, or simply run errands with you. The time you share will provide them a much-needed break from the stress and routine of their lives and give them another source of strength.

When a single parent or both parents deploy, children are left in the care of relatives, friends or professional caregivers. It is

critical that these children not be cut off from their friends and support systems that made up their lives when their parents were at home. Take photographs of these children when they come to your house, then either send them to the deployed parent(s) or save the photos for their return. This act helps the parents bridge the gap of their absence and their child’s growth. For children who have been uprooted from their homes and are now living in other locations, a card and a small gift certificate to an ice cream store or an online bookstore can go a long way in letting that child know that she is not forgotten.

A constant, unwelcome companion of these families is the fear of death. One wife said, “We learn to hold life loosely.” Every military family dreads the official car bringing sober, uniformed callers to the door. Since the beginning of the war in Iraq, these callers — usually a senior officer and a military chaplain — have delivered the news of death, serious injury, and prisoner-of-war status. The military has many systems in place for these occasions. Within a few days, a Casualty Assistance Calls Officer (CACO) is assigned to the surviving spouse and children (and to the parents of unmarried service members) who will assist the family through the maze of necessary official forms and notifications. The CACO will also assist with funeral arrangements, transportation, etc.

Friends and neighbors, however, provide the love and comfort that goes the extra mile. It is the “servant work” that means the most, and we can learn from the examples provided in military neighborhoods. Take a meal anytime, but especially after everyone else has returned to their own routines, while the family still hurts. Offer to answer the door, take in the meals, and keep a written record of visits and gifts. Offer to answer the phone. Have your children make a remembrance box for cards and notes received. Don’t ask questions to satisfy your own curiosity, but instead ask what you can do next. Listen to their story as many times as they want to tell it, but only *when* they want to tell it. Give a gift certificate for maid service or offer to clean the house for out-of-town guests. Invite the children over to play. Send a note about a special memory you have of their loved one.

While the importance of praying for our

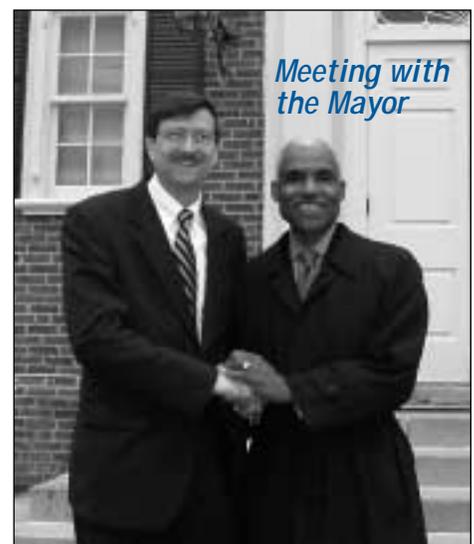
soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines and their families cannot be overstated, the real work of ministry to them is through our actions. Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34). Jesus modeled that love by humbling himself and serving others. He reminds us further, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Therein lies our true ministry.

*About the Authors:* Cmdr. Leanne Braddock, a Harding University Graduate School of Religion counseling student, is the daughter of a career naval officer. Married to a retired Navy man, Braddock has served in the U.S. Navy for 22 years. She is currently the director of the Navy Equal Opportunity Program in Millington, Tenn.

Dr. Michelle Mentzer has been a Navy wife for 14 years and is the treatment group coordinator for the Marine Corps Family Advocacy Program at Camp Pendleton, Calif. Her husband, Lt. Cmdr. Bruce Mentzer, is a 1983 alumnus who is currently serving as a battalion chaplain with the Marines in Iraq. Mentzer is co-authoring a book about Navy and Marine Corps families and the impact of this war on their lives.

This article represents the personal views and experiences of the authors and does not represent the official position of the U.S. Navy.



Dr. Everett Huffard greets Shelby County Mayor AC Wharton following the mayor’s chapel talk March 6.

*Return Service Requested*

## NASA Engineer Addresses Advancement Council

*by Larry Arick, director of advancement*

The Harding University Graduate School of Religion Advancement Council enjoyed a record attendance at its spring meeting. More than 230 members and guests came to honor the graduates of 2003 and to hear from one of our exciting new students. This year's guest speaker and student speaker was one and the same: Mike O'Neal. From Titusville, Fla., Mike is an engineer for NASA at the Kennedy Space Center. He shared with us the impact of the Challenger and Columbia shuttle disasters on him and the Kennedy Space Agency community.

Mike received the bachelor of science degree in electrical engineering at the University of Central Florida and a master's degree in engineering management at Florida Institute of Technology. He joined NASA in 1979, two years before the launch of the first shuttle. He was the assistant director and later the acting director of shuttle engineering for 19 years, the deputy

director for space station hardware integration for two years, and the expiration manager of architecting missions to Mars for three years. Currently he is in research and development with Kennedy Space Center researchers.

We are blessed to have someone like Mike enrolled here at the Graduate School. Mike plans to retire from NASA early and enter the ministry. When he made this decision, the next step was to find the graduate program that would best meet his needs. He chose the Harding University Graduate School of Religion and is pursuing a master's degree in Christian ministry.

Sometimes we choose retirement as an opportunity to rest and relax from years of hard work. Mike is choosing retirement as an opportunity to begin a new work in the Lord's Kingdom. He is an example of our students who are equipping themselves for their various ministries in the Lord's kingdom.



*(Top) Dr. David Burks, Harding University president, and (Bottom) Larry Arick, Graduate School of Religion director of advancement, thank Mike O'Neal for his talk at the March 6 Advancement Council luncheon.*