

MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Area ministers headed overseas as chaplains

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By MICKEY POWELL - Bulletin Staff Writer

Two Martinsville ministers will become the first two chaplains to be deployed from the same area and unit in the Virginia Army National Guard.

David Gilleran, pastor of Hope Presbyterian Church, and Lee Hagwood, pastor of Agape Bible Christian Fellowship, are part of the 134th Chaplain Support Team, which will be deployed to the Middle East later this month.

A joint farewell service will be held for the pastors at 7 p.m. today at Agape, 240 E. Market St. in Martinsville. Speaking from Fort Pickett in Blackstone on Friday, the pastors were unable to discuss their trip in detail. They said the Army considers details of the trip to be classified information.



Minister Lee Hagwood

However, they said the unit's mission will be to provide religious support to United States armed forces personnel and civilians involved in military operations. Hostilities in war zones can put soldiers at risk, causing stress that prompts them to need comfort and spiritual guidance, Hagwood said.

As a soldier, "when you're away from the security of home and thrust into a situation that is very different, you can have a difficult time adjusting" to the situation, Gilleran said. Chaplains "bring a sense of God to the battlefield" to help soldiers, as well as help soldiers practice their First Amendment right to practice their faith in places that may be hostile to Christians, he said.

Christian chaplains generally are able to work with soldiers of all Christian denominations, but they mostly work with Protestants, the chaplains said. Roman Catholic priests often are available to help Catholics, they said.

Soldiers are individuals and each has unique needs that chaplains must try to meet, Gilleran and Hagwood noted.

"Each case is different," Hagwood said. "We treat each person as an individual client." Gilleran has been in the Guard for more than 19 years, while Hagwood has served for about three years.

This will be Gilleran's second deployment overseas. His first was to Iraq in 2004. Hagwood will be going overseas for the first time.

They declined to say whether they are apprehensive about entering a war zone, saying it is a personal matter between them and their families. Still, they acknowledged they have discussed safety issues with their families.

Both chaplains believe their roles are important in helping soldiers make it through difficult circumstances.

Therefore, "I'm more than happy to go," Gilleran said.
"Somebody has to do it," despite the risks of combat, added Hagwood.