

## Auburn will host Veterans Well-Being Ministry Conference on Thursday

Patrick Johnston | Posted: Tuesday, July 30, 2013 6:01 pm

Alabama's pastors, clergy and faith based leaders are often on the frontlines in helping veterans.

Retired U.S. Army Chief of Chaplains (Maj. Gen.) Douglas L. Carver cites Veterans Affairs (VA) statistics to emphasize the importance of clergy. According to the VA, approximately 40 percent of veterans with mental health challenges seek assistance from spiritual leaders.

"It reinforces the fact that veterans have spiritual and religious underpinnings," Carver said. "They look to the clergy and faith based leaders as they process issues in their lives."

Carver will be the keynote speaker at Thursday's Alabama Veterans Well-Being Ministry Conference, which will be held at the Julie and Hal Moore Center for Excellence (Auburn Performing Arts Center). Faith-based leaders are invited to attend the free conference, which will be held from 9:30 a.m. until 3 p.m.

The event's aim is to help clergy better minister to veterans and their families. There will be sessions on post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide signs and symptoms, faith's role in helping disabled veterans and VA chaplaincy training.

Carver said many veterans deal with "deep spiritual issues" once they return from combat, including guilt, loss and even a lack of belonging and community. Many soldiers need months or even years to successfully reacclimate to the civilian world.

Carver said Thursday's event will help clergy better guide veterans who need mental health, financial planning or other types of assistance. He said the event will also help clergy better understand the military culture.

He said many churches recognize veterans with special services or one-time programs, but more is needed.

"What is needed is something far more intentional," he said. "What are you doing in the way of military outreach, and how can you expand that? How can churches establish lifelines to the veterans in their midst?"

Thursday's event is for all faiths. Carver said there are enough resources to assist veterans if churches partner together and with other organizations equipped to help veterans.

"If we come together, we can provide the help they need," he said.

Gov. Robert Bentley is scheduled to open the conference at 9:30 a.m. Other presenters will include the Veterans Affairs chaplaincy team; Lt. Gen. Ron Burgess, local ministers the Rev. Clifford Jones and the

Rev. George Mathison; Dr. John Campbell and the Veterans Affairs Post Traumatic Stress Disorder team and the Alabama National Guard Chaplaincy Team. David Riley, the 2010 National Disabled Veteran of the Year, is also scheduled to speak.

As of Tuesday afternoon, approximately 150 people had registered for the conference. For more information, including registration details, visit [www.servealabama.gov](http://www.servealabama.gov)

The Alabama Veterans Well-Being Ministry Conference is a partnership between the Alabama National Guard, Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs, Auburn University (Student Veterans Resource Center), Alabama Department of Mental Health, VA Chaplaincy, Alabama Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Volunteer Service (Serve Alabama), Army One Source, and the Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System Mental Health Recovery Center, the National Leadership Congress and Volunteers of America.