



November 10, 2023

## Thanking Our Veterans

In observation of Veterans Day this year, we would like to thank all veterans, and particularly those in our diocese, for their service to our country. We'd like to highlight the stories of two veterans in our diocese in particular, both of whom have shared their stories and highlighted different aspects of being a veteran in ministry: Theodore Somes, a Candidate for Holy Orders for the Priesthood and Lay Assistant for Christian Formation at St. Paul's in Mt. Lebanon, PA, and the Rev. Benjamin Wright, who currently serves as a supply priest at the Church of the Atonement in Carnegie, PA and St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Steubenville, Ohio.

Right out of high school, **Theodore Somes** joined the US Marine Corps Reserve as an infantry rifleman and served throughout college and up to his time at Virginia Theological Seminary. Theodore now serves in the Army Reserve as a Chaplain Candidate.



In considering how being a veteran has shaped his ministry, Theodore highlights four major aspects: duty, community, suffering and death. He emphasizes the importance of understanding duty as duty to country and to God. In considering the intersection of community and his experience as a veteran in ministry, Theodore says, "You may have very little in common with the people that you're serving with, but you have a mission to do. So, how are you going to do it? I think the church could learn a lot from that. Often, we get tanked in our divisions when really I think that what binds us together could take an entire lifetime to study and reflect upon and military service is a great example of that." His discussion on suffering and death are also centered on the value the veteran experience can bring to the church as people who face these realities often and head-on. In this vein, he says, "Especially when you're a recruit, there's a certain dignity that's taken away. And when that's taken away, it's really easy to see the dignity that God offers us."



**Benjamin Wright** served on active duty in the Air Force for 22 years, beginning with his being drafted in the Vietnam War, and has served as a priest for 29 years. In discussing his continued involvement with veterans ministry, Wright says, "I do a lot of volunteer work with the Veterans Breakfast Club, which gives veterans a safe place to tell their stories. It also preserves their stories, and it's for veterans and non-veterans both. It's about education, inspiration. As a priest, a lot of my interest in it is the healing aspect of it, for people

having a safe place to tell their stories.” In addition, Benjamin Wright also mentors veterans through the Beaver County Veterans Treatment Court.

Being a veteran has also impacted him personally in his walk with the Lord. Wright says, “Well, you know, you figure out that you can do a lot of very difficult things that you didn’t know that you could do or didn’t have the confidence to think you could do. But, with the Lord’s help, you certainly can. And obviously in ministry, that’s the case. Because without the Lord empowering you to do whatever he calls you to do, you’re not able to get there from here. And it’s also realization that, I can’t do it by myself. You know, I have to have the Lord’s blessing, help and empowerment to do anything really.”

The veteran community is a diverse community of people with a wealth of experiences, experiences the church in particular can learn from. Somes says, “Don’t judge them. Listen to their experience. Listen and seek to understand, but, don’t go in with some Hollywood version of what their military service looked like...In a similar vein, if someone is job seeking at your parish, and you look and see that they’ve served for however many years in the service, listen to what they have to say, because that experience may be very valuable for the parish to have. I would also encourage clergy across the diocese to show up to veterans’ community functions, particularly on Veterans Day, to support those who are being celebrated.”

[St. Paul’s Episcopal Church](#) in Mt. Lebanon, PA, is hosting a Veterans Day worship service at [Old St. Luke’s](#), a historic location that has a military history of its own, on Saturday, November 11th at 6:00pm. All are welcome.

*Almighty God, we commend to your gracious care and keeping all the men and women of our armed forces at home and abroad. Defend them day by day with your heavenly grace; strengthen them in their trials and temptations; give them courage to face the perils which beset them; and grant them a sense of your abiding presence wherever they may be; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

(Collect for those in the Armed Forces of our Country, BCP pg. 823)



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