News
Archbishop Timothy Broglio

Archbishop Timothy Broglio of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, delivers his reflection during the annual prayer service for United Nations diplomats at Holy Family Church in New York City Sept. 8. (OSV News/Gregory Shemitz)



by OSV News

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Washington — October 18, 2025
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Archbishop Timothy Broglio of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services said Oct. 17 the U.S. Army has cancelled all religious support contracts for Army chapels, "including those for religious educators, administrators, and musicians." He said this has placed on Catholics "an insurmountable restriction on the free exercise of religion."

"For those who attend Mass, visit chapel offices, or participate in faith formation on a U.S. Army installation, you likely noticed, that beginning on Sunday, 5 October 2025, contract services and contractor offices were dark and music was absent during Mass," the archbishop said in a letter addressed to members of the military archdiocese, which he said will also be sent to all members of Congress.

"These changes were not due to the government shutdown," he said, "but rather, due to a memorandum issued in March of this year by U.S. Army Installation Management Command which directed the cancellation of all chapel contracts for Coordinators of Religious Education (CRE), Catholic Pastoral Life Coordinators

(CPLC), and musician contracts, across the U.S. Army."

He assured the faithful of the military archdiocese that he "will pursue all legal options to address this grave misstep."

A spokesperson for the Department of Defense — which is using the moniker "Department of War" as a secondary, ceremonial title under an executive order signed by President Donald Trump — directed OSV News to the U.S. Army for comment. The U.S Army did not immediately respond to an inquiry.

"For decades, contracted CREs, CPLCs, and musicians have served the faith communities at military chapels. Their essential services have assisted Catholic priest chaplains in their duties and animated the life of the community," Broglio said.

"Over the past several months," he added, "I have met with the Secretary of the Army and the Army Chief of Chaplains about the severe, negative impact that the cancellation of these chapel contracts will have on Catholic soldiers serving in the U.S. Army and their families entrusted to my care."

Broglio expressed "tremendous gratitude for CREs, CPLCs, and musicians" and "deep lament that the Army's actions have proven so injurious to the practice of the Catholic faith on Army installations."

"There are merely 137 Catholic chaplains serving in the active and reserve components of the U.S. Army, yet there are more than 2,500 chaplains in the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps," he continued. "This means that less than 5.5% of the Chaplain Corps is Catholic. However, about twenty-percent of soldiers are Catholic."

Advertisement

Broglio cited a RAND report that found "there are approximately six Protestant chaplains for every 1,000 Protestant soldiers, and approximately one Catholic chaplain for every 1,000 Catholic soldiers."

So the cancellation of religious support contracts "disproportionately harms Catholics," he said. "First, because Catholic chaplains are already so low density and in such high demand, and second because the Catholic faith requires continuing religious education and sacramental preparation that can only be accomplished

through competent support."

"Catholic priests who serve as U.S. Army chaplains offer spiritual and pastoral care to soldiers of any, or even no faith," he added. "At the same time, they also serve, within their Catholic faith, six times the number of soldiers served by Protestant chaplains. The sheer number of Catholic soldiers and families creates a significant pastoral and administrative responsibility for Catholic chaplains.

"Moreover, because Catholic chaplains are most often assigned full-time to operational units, such as brigades and battalions, the demands of the unit, and the operational tempo of deployments, field time, and training rotations, make it impossible for a Catholic chaplain to oversee the daily operations of chapel programs without professional support."

Canceling chapel contracts "may appear to be a neutral elimination of chapel support which itself affects the free exercise of religion for all soldiers," Broglio said. But he said the Army’s action "over-burdens Catholic chaplains," "harms chapel communities" and "intolerably infringes upon the free exercise of religion for Catholics in the U.S. Army."

He implored the faithful of the archdiocese "to continue to worship at military chapels and offer your gifts and talents for the building up of the Church, especially in sacramental preparation and religious education."