

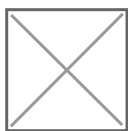
[News](#)



U.S. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth speaks during a news conference at the White House in Washington April 6, 2026. (OSV News/Reuters/Evan Vucci)

Kate Scanlon

[View Author Profile](#)



OSV News

[View Author Profile](#)

[**Join the Conversation**](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

October 2, 2026

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth announced the creation of a new "Office of Religious Affairs" during a speech Sept. 30 on Pentagon policy.

Hegseth — who uses the moniker "secretary of war" since Trump signed an executive order last year adding the "Department of War" as a secondary, ceremonial title for the Department of Defense — announced the new office during a speech at U.S. Marine Corps Base Quantico in Virginia.

"The experts, our chaplains, will finally have an advocate at the highest levels," Hegseth said. "Policy and resources will serve the mission, not smother the mission."

Elsewhere in the speech, Hegseth also announced the "Autonomous Warfare Command," an effort to develop autonomous capabilities across the military.

Catholic leaders, particularly Pope Leo XIV, have warned against the creation of autonomous weapons. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, in a backgrounder on Pope Leo's encyclical "Magnifica Humanitas," said the rise of these systems marked a "grave development of military technology."

Hegseth also confirmed plans to cut the number of spots reserved for admirals and generals by 20%, doubling the 10% reduction he ordered last year.

Hegseth also said he wanted "no fatties, no trannies, no beardos, no weirdos, no wimps, no radicals" in the armed services.

A statement from the Department of Defense, also using the Department of War moniker, said it "is elevating spiritual readiness as a core element of combat effectiveness with the establishment of the Office of Religious Affairs, a direct-report office to the Secretary of War charged with driving Department-wide policy, resource advocacy, and action."

Advertisement

"Wars are fought by people, and the strength of the force depends not only on weapons, training, and technology, but also on the resilience, conviction, and moral strength of those who serve," the statement said. It added the new office will "ensure religious affairs are no longer dispersed across distant bureaucratic layers, giving senior leaders a dedicated capability to protect free exercise, remove policy barriers, identify unmet requirements, and secure the support needed for the Service chaplaincies to succeed."

The statement added, "The Service chaplaincies will remain the Department's primary providers of religious support; ORA will give them a powerful advocate at the highest level of the Department."

"The office will not compel religious participation, favor one faith, or diminish the rights of personnel of any faith or lack thereof," it said. "Instead, it will help ensure every member of the Force has voluntary, meaningful access to religious support and community that fosters purpose and resilience needed to endure hardship, deployment, combat, and loss."

In his speech, Hegseth said, "Our department is, you might say, putting on the full armor of God."

The phrase appeared to come from Chapter 6 of St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, where the apostle urges the Christian community: "Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil. For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens."

A spokesperson for the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services did not immediately respond to OSV News' request for comment.