

Healing Greets Veterans at 'Welcome Home' Doors

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Wednesday, May 07, 2014

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A new Pentagon report found that suicides among active-duty military troops dropped by 15 percent last year. While that means prevention programs might be working, the amount of reserve soldier suicides is still going up.

One man's mission to help veterans heal from their past starts with one prayer at a time.

Before becoming a priest, Nigel Mumford spent seven years as a drill instructor for England's Royal Marine Corp.

His military service included combat, where he experienced the horrors of war up close

"I was shot at three times, blown up five times. I was wounded in the head," Mumford said.

Unseen Wounds

His wounds, however, were not only physical.

"The biggest fear I had as a drill instructor was that one of the guys I was taking through basic training would die. And four of them did and that pushed me right over the edge," Mumford said. "I couldn't speak for a week, and I shuttered very badly for six months with full-blown shell shock."

Mumford's recovery has been a long process.

"There were many triggers - the car would backfire and I would hit the deck and roll over with an imaginary gun in my hand," he said. "It's been very slow."

That all changed when he received healing for his emotional and mental pain through a spiritual experience.

"I was back on the street and God really did something with me and brought the memory back but with Christ in the memory," he shared. "And that was the defining moment."

'Welcome Home' Healing

After returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, U.S. military personnel have been killing themselves in alarming numbers. An estimated 22 veterans commit suicide every day.

Psychiatrists blame the suicides on PTSD, or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Father Mumford hopes to provide help and healing to veterans through his ministry called "[The Welcome Home Initiative](#)."

The project is an intense three-day retreat for combat veterans who suffer from PTSD designed to provide them a safe place that can begin a healing process.

"We want to hear their story and we listen, we love and we pray. We don't condemn, we don't condone," Mumford said.

"We listen as Christ would listen," he continued. "We invite Christ into the memory, so really what we're doing is replaying the DVD in their mind and at some point stop pushing the pause button and then having them look around for Christ. Where is Christ in this memory?"

"And that is the key to setting captives free from memories that haunt and really these men and women have been haunted," he said.

Silently Suffering, Boldly Healing

Of the 2 million American veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan, experts estimate as many as 300,000 may silently suffer from PTSD, making programs like "Welcome Home" vital.

"If we can save one life or hundreds of lives through this ministry in bringing Christ into that wound, knowing that memories can be healed - that's the key," Mumford said.

Bruce Kittleson helps the military community through the group [Olive Branch International](#). He credits the "Welcome Home Initiative" with providing help and hope to veterans both past and present.

"People who after the war poured their lives into making a life creating businesses and having family and grandchildren and then

when they reach retirement those issues from World War II came back up because they don't go away by themselves and so they have to be dealt with. Healing has to be brought to them," Kittleson said.

A key goal is helping veterans deal with the memory and pain of taking a human life.

"God told me to anoint the trigger finger on this man who was a sniper and to actually put oil on the finger and to set that trigger finger free," Mumford said. "The Bible's very clear in the 10 Commandments, 'Thou shalt not kill,' which is actually 'Thou shall not commit murder.'"

"But in Ecclesiastes it says 'There is a time to kill and a time to heal,'" he continued. "For veterans, that's a big deal. I've met people who are so hurt by that. They've condemned themselves."

A Longing Met

Joe longed to be free from tormenting thoughts following his service in Vietnam.

He said help from government sponsored programs only lasted a short time, so he didn't put much faith in the "Welcome Home Initiative."

"When I went, honestly, my thoughts about it - 'This is another one of those deals where I'm going to go do another program and I'm going to leave there just like I got there.' I might feel better surfacely (sic) for a day or two and then same old, same old because that's what I experienced all those coping stuff," Joe explained.

But he said this time, something just clicked.

"There's a general peace about the situation that was never there before and I would encourage anybody and I think God can really honestly use this to show a person his realness because if you struggled with this thing for 40 years and you see it taken care of, I mean any part of it at all - you gotta see God," Joe said.

More Than a Patch Job

Other vets agree that spiritual connection is the key to lasting peace.

"You can provide physically the nurture and everything else, but if you don't have a spiritual back up and a background on things to really help people and have the Lord just come in and really minister graphically to these people then it's only really a patch job," veteran Tim Thomas said

Mumford hopes to expand the program through churches and other organizations.

DVD teachings are available for groups to use with the hope that combat veterans can find the healing and freedom they desperately need and so rightfully deserve.

"It's such a privilege," Mumford said. "It's like you're holding a soul in your hand for a moment and you're just seeing that person melt and come back to reality."

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