

Introduction: Welcome to *Engage360*, Denver Seminary's podcast. Join us as we explore the redemptive power of the Gospel and the life changing truth of Scripture at work in our culture today.

Dr. Don Payne: Hey friends, welcome again to *Engage360* from Denver Seminary. I'm Don Payne. Thanks for joining us again. As the Coronavirus and COVID-19 spike again, tragically across our nation, and I guess across our world, frontline caregivers should be really prominent in our attention in our prayers, our support as well. And when we talk about caregivers, those frontline caregivers, we often have in mind healthcare professionals who put themselves at considerable risk, but the boundaries of healthcare extend beyond the physical, the biological, and they include the whole person before God. So this week we're going to learn about what I think is one of the most complex and challenging forms of frontline ministry out there. Chaplains. Now, two of my favorite 20th century theologians TF Torrance from Scotland and Helmut Thielicke from Germany, both served as chaplains to their respective armies in World War II. And they were literally in the heart of combat zones, ministering to soldiers whose lives were in many cases, just about to be lost.

And both of them later observed that the trenches you literally or metaphorically are a proving-ground for the truth of our theology, has to work there if it's going to be any good anywhere else. Now, chaplains, these days serve in lots of different settings. Some of which might surprise you, and if you really want to be stretched and your understanding of how the Gospel works outside, the familiar, comfortable zones of our lives, the role of chaplains can really expand our vision. Now our guest this week to help us explore this role of chaplains and what the redemptive power of the Gospel looks like through the role of a chaplain is my longtime friend and colleague Dr. Jan McCormack. Jan, welcome to *Engage360*.

Dr. Jan McCormack: Thank you Don.

Dr. Don Payne: Jan is a retired Air Force chaplain retired as a Lieutenant, a Lieutenant Colonel. So I always feel like I need to salute her when I meet her in the hallway. Jan is also the founder and director of the Chaplaincy degree program here at Denver Seminary and has just a wide array of experiences internationally as a published author about chaplaincy. We'll talk a little bit about that as we go, but Jan, tell us just a little bit about your own chaplaincy story, your own chaplaincy background.

Dr. Jan McCormack: Sure, Don. So the majority of my time as a chaplain was 20 years, nine months and 10 days worth as an Air Force chaplain. Yeah, that's what it says on my retirement flag and that's how they, they know how to pay me. So that's not bad. In addition to being a military chaplain, I have experience as a hospital, chaplain police chaplain, prison, chaplain, crisis and disaster chaplain business, and industry chaplain, and even in NASCAR and drag racing chaplaincy

Dr. Don Payne: That's pretty cool. You know probably over 20 years ago, my wife and I took a cruise and I became pretty sure that God was calling me to be a cruise ship chaplain at the time until I found out, I mean I was joking, but, and then I found out that's a real thing.

Dr. Jan McCormack: It really is. Yeah.

Dr. Don Payne: Chaplains serve in all kinds of environments.

Dr. Jan McCormack: One of the things I tell the students at the Seminary is it's one of the few types of ministry where you can take your advocacy and turn it into your vocation.

Dr. Don Payne: Okay. Okay. In some ways I suspect this year we've all lived through, it could probably be called the year of the chaplain. But, but how has so, or I shouldn't say, but how have some of the, the challenges we've all faced this year affected the role of chaplains, the work of chaplains in these various settings?

Dr. Jan McCormack: I think in general and from the research that I've been looking at as well, it seems that the role of chaplain has taken much more prominent view than it has in the past. With COVID causing lockdowns, family members everywhere, but especially in the hospitals and especially in eldercare settings and hospice settings, it's typically only chaplains that are able to be there with the residents and the patients.

Dr. Don Payne: I remember it, and this is going to date me, but I remember the long running TV series from the seventies and early eighties MASH. And there was this one character in this MASH unit who was, he was the company chaplain Father Mulcahy. And I remember how they portrayed him. And this was probably a typical Hollywood portrayal of religious people, but they portrayed the chaplain Mulcahy as this really nice guy who was a rather benign figure. And who also constantly struggled with a sense of his own what should I say? That he really didn't have much of a significant contribution. He always felt like he was on the margins of things, never really on the action where he could make a real difference like the doctors could. And that image, even though it was kind of a Hollywood image has struck me as a way of thinking about the inverse power of the gospel through that kind of a role because by cultures standards, chaplains have a, maybe a marginal role, right. But where the gospel really always functions is, is between the lines or in roles and settings and in activities that by the culture standards, aren't making much of a really important difference, but chaplains are there on the front lines. Talk about that, is that fair?

Dr. Jan McCormack: I think it's very fair to say the chaplains are always functioning on the front lines. Since we take ministry to people, instead of waiting for them to come to us, what ends up happening is we take ministry to people in their moments of crisis. And that's the time where a lot of people are uncomfortable. Don't know what to do. Think they have to do something. Don't know what to say yet. Chaplains are the ones that are there.

Dr. Don Payne: Lots of people may not be aware of how multifaceted chaplaincy work has become. And you mentioned some of the variety of settings that you've served in as a chaplain. I'd love to hear more from you on that. Give us kind of an overview of, of some of the really different settings and actually how chaplains work in those settings, what do they tend to do?

Dr. Jan McCormack: Okay. So first some of the other kinds of settings, and some of them have even been our own students. I've had students that have been placed with all of the first providers with police and fire department and EMTs. I've had students that have been placed in equine therapy with disabled children. I have friends who've been sports chaplains, and in fact created a 501(c)3 of international soccer chaplaincy. And of course there are many different kinds of sports chaplaincies that the chaplains can get into. We've had chaplains in malls when malls were open, we have chaplains at airports. We've had chaplains with the rodeo. We have chaplains here in work. You can do that.

Dr. Don Payne: Once I'm finished my gig with, on the cruise ship, I'm going to be a rodeo.

Dr. Jan McCormack: Yeah. Here in Colorado, we have chaplains that work with ski resorts. In California, we have chaplains that work with surfers.

Dr. Don Payne: I know you have some, some pretty riveting stories of chaplains, and what they've found themselves involved in. And I have one particular in mind, but I'm going to see what story, what best story you have in mind that would illustrate the significance of this type of frontline ministry.

Dr. Jan McCormack: Oh gosh. There are just so many, it's hard to figure out which, where to go with some of them. Go ahead.

Dr. Don Payne: I'm thinking about the one at 9/11 in Washington.

Dr. Jan McCormack: Oh yes. So that was, that was our first student that graduated from our chaplaincy program. And he is a former Marine who was going into Navy chaplaincy. And the Navy chief of chaplains to this day still does a final interview himself or herself before they will accept somebody into active duty. And Wayne was just a chaplain candidate, second Lieutenant wanting to go into chaplaincy. And his interview was scheduled for the day 9/11 happened. And he was in DC at the Sheraton Hotel waiting for his interview. He called over to the chief's office and said, I presume my interview's off. And they said, yeah, we forgot about you. Where are you? And he said, he was at the Sheraton Hotel. And they said, well, we're setting that up as the next to King command post, go down and make yourself useful. After everything settled, the chief of chaplains, exec who's a friend of mine called and said that Wayne was the one that went down and organized everybody and even told very senior chaplains what to do and how to take care of people. And then later on the chief hired me to go on the road and teach some of his chaplains. But he said, if that's the kind of

chaplains we're turning out at Denver Seminary, if you say that they're qualified, we'll never turn them down. And to this day they haven't.

Dr. Don Payne: That's remarkable. Well, good on you and well done.

Dr. Jan McCormack: Good on Wayne.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. Well, and, on you and others who, who trained him. Now, I know that the work of chaplaincy in many settings is very broad based because they're having to function in a religiously pluralistic environment. And for evangelical Christians who are committed to the historic Gospel, that that has to be a bit of a challenge or a stretch in some ways.

Dr. Jan McCormack: It is Don, that's one of the hardest things sometimes is to live in that tension. As I teach the students here, the only reason we're allowed to have chaplaincy in a country like ours with a separation of church and state is because of the second clause of the first amendment, which is the pre-exercise clause. But the concept is chaplains are hired to protect the free exercise of their care recipients, religion, and faith. Not necessarily, it's not necessarily about their own. So our students have to be able to understand what they thoroughly believe while still supporting everybody else's faith, or even lack of faith at times. And that really definitely creates tension for them.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. Because with a commitment to the gospel, how do help them know how to navigate that and be faithful to the Gospel and yet also faithful to, you know, their commission as a chaplain, whatever the setting is?

Dr. Jan McCormack: Well, one of the things I tell them is even more than a local church, pastor, they'd better know what they believe themselves or out in that secular world. There'll be pulled and pushed by everybody and feel like they have to make nice with everybody and agree with everybody, which isn't the case. The other thing of course is we tell them to always be ready to speak the truth, but it's always dependent upon the client's need, if you would. And the timing of when they're ready to hear. And that's something that takes us evangelicals a lot to understand that we have to wait on the other person rather than just rush in like oftentimes we're taught or wish to. Another piece of that is that it's about relationships. And once the relationship is formed, then oftentimes the other person will say, so tell me what you believe? If I can share another short story from my own work as a chaplain. I was stationed over in Ankara, Turkey, the capital of Turkey during the first Gulf War. And I had the privilege of building a chapel over there, which was kind of fun. And of course from Friday night to Sunday night, we'd have 13 different worship services in our chapel based on different faith backgrounds.

And I had to make sure that they were all taken care of. After we built this chapel, the civilian Ema Muslim chief, if you would, on the base, came in and ask if his folks could worship on Friday at noon for their prayer time. And I said, well,

of course you can, but you know, it's the government, we got to do paperwork on this and do you want this room? Do you want it bring your prayer rugs? Do you want me to keep your prayer rugs? How do you want us to set this up for you? So we sorted that all out and for about three months or so, all of the Muslims on base, which were mostly civilians, but some of our military and family members as well would come for their Friday high, Holy prayer times. And then one day they see mom came to visit me and he said, Mrs. Major Janet. We will no longer be meeting here. And I said, man, that, that just hurts. My heart is something wrong. Did we not give you something you needed? Did we offend you in some way? And he said, no, no, no. I want you to know now that I know you were a person of the book, and whenever I talk about you from now on, you'll be Mrs. Major Jan, my American friend, the Christian Ema. And is it okay if I send Muslims to you for counseling? Still makes me cry to this day.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. Well what a powerful example of the patient incremental progress. And of course, who knows what God might have done with that long-term that you would never have access to. Right.

Dr. Jan McCormack: Exactly. And it was, it was by him watching me, as he said, be a person in the book, living my faith and respecting them that it really opened the door for that. And then especially Muslim women would come to me for counseling. That was huge. And sometimes they'd look at me and say, can you tell me about the God that makes you smile because ours doesn't and that's when they opened the door and that's when you're ready to walk through. In some ways it's similar to what I think Paul did it in Marcel when he, when he would go in and say, let me tell you about all these unknown gods. He knew their context. He didn't put them down. He just very patiently waited. And then scripture says, and some ask him to tell them, and he did. And of course not everyone believed either.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. But they never, you know, that's always the case wherever we are.

Dr. Jan McCormack: But the point was waiting to be asked.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. Yeah. That's what we can lock in on waiting to be asking. So this has to be a very, I guess, a very patient form of ministry, right?

Dr. Jan McCormack: It is. And one of the things, especially with our evangelical students and myself, even when I started you almost think in polar opposites, you think I either always have to rush in and put down the four spiritual laws and just push for a conversion or you're not allowed to at all. And when the students finally figure out that it's not those polar opposites, it's just waiting for God's timing, then it frees them up to do what they're called to do.

Dr. Don Payne: Oh yeah. That makes a lot of sense. Now, have you seen differences in the way chaplains function in these different settings? I mean, you know, you've got institutional chaplaincy military, and then all these creative iterations, or are

there some differences in the way the role expresses itself in these different settings?

Dr. Jan McCormack: In some ways, similar to doing missionary work, it has to be contextualized to where you're at. So you have to learn the language and the ethos. So that typically institutions that you're working in, because you're always working in somebody else's, if you would office in their, in their business place.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. That makes sense. So you're always on somebody else's turf in one way. Right?

Dr. Jan McCormack: Exactly. You know, even if you're one of them, even though I was a military officer too, when I'd go out to say my maintenance water or my fliers squadron, I was still going into their world. And a lot of that is definitely going into somebody else's world and knowing the language and fitting in and waiting again to be invited into their world.

Dr. Don Payne: Jan, over the course of your careers as a chaplain, you serve 20 years plus in the Air Force and then have served as a chaplain in all these other settings as well. How, how did your own understanding or approach to the role of a chaplain either change or just deepen over those years?

Dr. Jan McCormack: Yeah, that's a really good question, Don, because one of the things I found that I didn't really expect and it kind of ties into, you know, can we share the Gospel? Was it, it deepened my own faith as I rubbed up against other people's. It would be like, well, okay, I can see where you're coming from, but I could never do that because this is what scripture says, and this is what my experience has been. And this is what the Lord's taught me. So one of the things that happened was I got stronger in my own evangelical faith. I think some of the other things that have changed is I learned, I learned the power of presence, the power of being with somebody rather than doing for somebody. And as somebody whose undergraduate degree was in psychiatric social, I was more into doing for somebody. You have a problem, let me fix it for you. Where instead, most people typically just want somebody that cares enough to be with them in the darkest moment for their lives.

Dr. Don Payne: That's the trench, right?

Dr. Jan McCormack: That's the trenches. And that's where chaplains always find themselves are on the front lines of people's pain.

Dr. Don Payne: Tell us a little bit about your book on chaplaincy.

Dr. Jan McCormack: Oh, well, that's kind of a fun story. So when I started teaching at Denver Seminary, I kept looking for a book to use, to teach introduction to chaplaincy. And all of the military chaplains wrote on there, was war stories, the hospital chaplains talked about bedside ministry. Other kinds of chaplains, these didn't

even really exist in writing. And so I just started putting together PowerPoints, and teaching what my experience was. And a few years into that, one of the students says, why the heck don't you write a book on this because it's your life. And so that kind of started me thinking about it. I don't think writing is one of my greatest spiritual gifts, but fortunately one of my closest friends, Dr. Naomi Padgett, who's basically who's who in international crisis and disaster ministry.

Dr. Don Payne: She's pretty big time.

Dr. Jan McCormack: She is pretty big time. We, we worked together. In fact, she worked for me at the seminary for a while, and we've been friends all these years.

Dr. Don Payne: And really my claim to fame is that I know you and you know her.

Dr. Jan McCormack: There you go. I mean, you say Naomi's going to teach something in the world shows up, but Naomi really knew to stick to how to write. And I had a lot of it, the vision for what I wanted in it. And so the two of us put that book together. What's the title of it. It's called *The Work of the Chaplain* and the publisher is Judson Press came out in 2003.

Dr. Don Payne: Okay. Okay. *The Work of the Chaplain*, I thought you had one called the many faces of chaplains here. Is that a course?

Dr. Jan McCormack: That's the course. That's my intro to chaplaincy course.

Dr. Don Payne: Okay. But *The Work of the Chaplain* is the title of the book, correct. Okay. Well, let me commend that to listeners, if they have any interest at all, or know people who have interest in chaplaincy, *The Work of the Chaplain*.

Hey, Jan, for people who might be thinking about some sort of chaplaincy ministry, now that you have expanded our vision about what chaplaincy is in a variety of settings what are some of the gifts and the character qualities people need to cultivate, if they're thinking about that ministry, and then how do you help a person discern whether chaplain sees a good direction for their ministry?

Dr. Jan McCormack: Boy, those are wonderful questions. So some of the, some of the gifting I think, is to have just a real heart of compassion for people to be able to see beyond what somebody has done or what they believe, or how they they've lived and see them as, as God would see them as somebody that Christ died for. To be able to know that you need to go towards somebody instead of almost in pride, waiting for somebody to come to you. That ministry of presence, to be able to sit with people in the ashes, in their darkest scariest moments, kind of reminds me of Jesus in the garden with his seminaries. He's praying about going to the cross. And he says to the disciples, just stay awake with me. Don't fight for me, don't tell me whether I should go to the cross. Don't take my place. Justy stay awake with me during this time while my heart is just in turmoil. And so it's that, that presence of that makes such a difference. I think also in general for any

good pastor, but especially for chaplains, because you're going to people that aren't necessarily coming to you, you have to be able to listen way more than you talk. You have to understand how to empathize with somebody rather than to sympathize with them and to go at their pace of what they need rather than what you really know in your heart that they need to get to eventually.

Dr. Don Payne: So how do you help a person discern whether, I mean, you probably have a lot of prospective students come through your office, talking about the chaplaincy program. How do you help them discern whether that's where they ought to go?

Dr. Jan McCormack: Well, I think one of the things is the first course that I wrote called *The Many Faces of Chaplaincy*. And that really is an introduction to chaplaincy and talks about some of the things we've talked about this morning. It talks about the similarities and differences between being a church pastor and being a chaplain in a pluralistic secular world. It talks about the different types of chaplaincy and what's involved in those roles. It talks about one needs to have in order to be hired. For instance, in the more high paying chaplaincies one needs to have a master's of divinity or the equivalent of 72 hours, you also need to have typically an ordination or its equivalency from whatever faith group you represent, and then be endorsed for chaplaincy by a nationally recognized body.

Dr. Don Payne: Now, these are for the more established organizational settings, right? Like the military and hospital chaplaincy?

Dr. Jan McCormack: Anything that, that anything with the federal government, like the military, like the veteran's affairs hospital, like federal prisons and hospital chaplaincy, those in particular as chaplaincy is becoming more and more known and crossing state lines. A lot of those chaplaincies like hospice chaplaincy and elder care, which are two of the biggest growing forms of chaplaincy right now, as I say, because we baby boomers like me are not going quietly in that good night, and there's a bunch of us, and they haven't had as much national agreement in what their credentialing is. It's almost what the institution needs or wants or what the society will bear at that point. But because of COVID, and also because it's becoming more common, it's starting to crystallize itself and looking at some of the other forms of chaplaincy, like healthcare chaplaincy and say, well, what are their requirements and what do they need?

Dr. Don Payne: So there's some variety there in terms of the educational requirements and the certifications.

Dr. Jan McCormack: Exactly. And you can be a volunteer chaplain and not have a clue what you're doing and cause harm to people if you don't know what you're doing.

Dr. Don Payne: Okay. All right. Well, on that note, you launched, I think the chaplaincy degree program here at Denver Seminary some years back, what makes that unique? Tell us a little bit about the program.



Dr. Jan McCormack: I did. Well, sometimes you don't know what you don't know, and.

Dr. Don Payne: That's the story of my life. I can write a whole book.

Dr. Jan McCormack: We can co-author it. But when I got the idea of a chaplaincy program, actually our former Provost and Dean Randy McFarland did, and I was doing my doctorate work there at the Seminary. So we started talking about it and I took our current academic catalog at that point, looked at all the courses and went, these are absolutely awesome, but what's missing that. I wish I had known when I was in seminary to become a chaplain. So I just started playing around with it and listed 12 credit hours worth of courses, many fits the chaplaincy, being one of them and wrote up what I thought it would be, and wrote up kind of a course description for it and sent it off to Randy. And at this point I was still on active duty with the air force, assuming that I was just going to create this thing and let somebody else run it and I'd stay in the military. And Randy called me up at work one day and he says, Jan, the faculty and the board have approved your idea. And I said, Oh good. And I remember him saying Jan, they haven't approved anything new since Jesus was born. I thought, I guess this is a bigger deal than I thought. And so that kind of started it. And I ended up having a few extra health concerns, which have been my whole life as well, and decided to retire from the military early. And then that's another story of how I finally got to the Seminary to be a full-time faculty member there.

Dr. Don Payne: So you've now placed chaplains in probably every branch of the military and in all kinds of settings around the world. I guess a lot of seminaries have some kind of a course on chaplaincy, but it's fairly unusual. Isn't it having an entire track or a certification devoted to chaplaincy?

Dr. Jan McCormack: Yeah, there aren't too many that are doing that now. In fact, it must've been about two years ago that some of my friends that started what they what's called the chaplaincy innovation lab, it's an online chaplaincy think group, if you would, and resource group. And they got a loose grant to do some research on chaplaincy and educating chaplains. At that point, they said that there were something like 70 seminaries that had something in chaplaincy, maybe one thing or a little bit of something, but that our program was the oldest and the most in-depth one at that time. And one of the other reasons is because we also embedded in our degree program for our students, the requirement to do one unit of clinical pastoral education. And that was very unusual at the time. In fact, to my knowledge, there's only five seminaries besides us that are doing that.

Dr. Don Payne: And we're one of the few, I think that has CPE, that clinical pastoral education kind of embedded in the Seminary rather than having to outsource that, that still the case?

Dr. Jan McCormack: Yes. That's the case. As I said, there's probably about six seminaries now that are doing that.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. Yeah. That's pretty unusual. And feather in your cap for that, Jan. What are maybe the top couple of things you would want listeners to know about chaplaincy or even how to pray for those who are serving as chaplains right now?

Dr. Jan McCormack: Oh, thank you, Don. I think one of the things that I want people to know is, is what most of us chaplains have battled our whole lives is that we haven't left ministry at all. In fact, we've just picked ministry into the field and similar to missionaries, we work with individuals, but chaplains also work with institutions and chaplains have been on the front lines of causing institutions to change. For instance, it was Navy chaplains back at the beginning of our history as a country that got people, if you would sailors soldiers to be paid in cash instead of be, be paid in alcohol. So oftentimes chaplains make ethical changes or moral changes in an institution. In hospitals, usually chaplains are in charge of the ethics committee that sits in hospitals. So you can change the whole institution by your presence by, by living the gospel even more than telling the gospel.

Dr. Don Payne: Well, chaplains are certainly on the front lines now with the coronavirus and the battle against COVID right alongside the traditional healthcare providers. And I think it's important for all of us who see that regularly on the news and, and want to do all we can to encourage and support those frontline healthcare workers. It's important for us to realize that right alongside them, or maybe between the lines of the more public version of what those frontline workers do are the chaplains.

Dr. Jan McCormack: Indeed. That's true. In fact, in places like hospitals, hospice, and elder care, which of course are where our most at-risk people end up being they won't let volunteers into that organization. So it has to be employed chaplains and the chaplains will spend as much time working with the staff as they will with the patients, the residents and their family members.

Dr. Don Payne: So right now it's the chaplains who have access to ministry that traditional pastors and anybody else doesn't have, cause they can't go in?

Dr. Jan McCormack: Exactly.

Dr. Don Payne: Remarkable. How would you encourage people to pray for chaplains?

Dr. Jan McCormack: Oh my gosh. Pray for their strength, for their safety and pray for their courage to live their faith so that people will see them and how they behave, how they act and wanting to know more about who they believe in and why.

Dr. Don Payne: Good word. Jan. Thanks. This has been great.

Dr. Jan McCormack: Thank you, Don. It's been wonderful working with you all these years.

Dr. Don Payne:

It has been fun friends. We've been interacting with Dr. Jan McCormack, who is the director of the chaplaincy program here at Denver Seminary, retired Air Force, chaplain herself. And probably one of the, I think it's fair to say one of the one of the nation's leading experts on the work of the chaplain and has a book by that title, *The Work of the Chaplain*. So if you're interested in that yourself, or if you know somebody who is put them onto Jan's book or have them get in touch with her here at Denver Seminary. You can learn a lot more about the chaplaincy program on our website. You'll find it at [denverseminary.edu](http://denverseminary.edu). You can email Jan. Her email address is on the faculty page of the Seminary website. So we hope you'll check into that and tell others about it. We're always grateful, really grateful that you would spend a little bit of time with us. Hope you find these conversations really encouraging and beneficial, and expanding your heart and your mind for what the redemptive power of the gospel really looks like because that's what we're committed to here at Denver Seminary. Thank you again, my name is Don Payne and I look forward to another conversation. Take care.