

Here I Am!

Send Me!

M. Gilda Dholah-Roddy is embracing her call to ministry as a newly commissioned U.S. Army Reserve chaplain.

BY DIXIL L. RODRÍGUEZ



It began with a humble prayer by a young girl from the island of Mauritius: “God, send me where You need me.” Without a doubt, God heard her sincere request. Those who know M. Gilda Dholah-Roddy, North American Division Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries (ACM) associate director, can attest that she has embraced her call to ministry with the grace and determination to speak the truth, echo the promises of God, and faithfully serve where called. Gilda’s fervor and love for God and the Seventh-day Adventist Church are evident in the diverse forms of ministry and leadership wherein she has served. Given her nonlinear path of service, it is no surprise that Gilda’s next bend on the road would take her back to her original prayer and acceptance of ministry.

A commissioning ceremony presenting, recognizing, and honoring Gilda as a U.S. Army Reserve chaplain

was held on April 17, 2023, at the North American Division (NAD) office in Columbia, Maryland. Brigadier General Andrew R. Harewood, a senior chaplain in the U.S. Army Reserve and a Seventh-day Adventist minister, administered the oath of office.

“I know her to be a brilliant and gifted servant leader,” stated Harewood. “She answered the call to say, ‘Here I am! Send me!’ . . . She will make an immediate impact on the thousands of soldiers under her ministry responsibility.”

The responsibilities Gilda has taken as an Army chaplain are numerous. They include providing emotional, spiritual, and pastoral support; offering counseling, mentoring, and religious education; officiating in funerals and weddings; and creating relationship-building platforms to foster the mental fitness soldiers need to overcome the challenges and rigors of military ser-

vice. Gilda will serve one weekend a month, two weeks a year, supporting service members and their families in the 55th Sustainment Brigade based at Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

“Ministry is multifaceted, and in this season I am called to serve God and country,” said Gilda. “[As] an island girl, serving in the U.S. Army, I continue to be amazed at where God has brought me and continues to direct me.”

Creating Safe Spaces Outside Normative Margins

Colleagues, friends, peers, and the countless chaplains mentored by Gilda can speak to one specific tenet of her life: She leads by example. Her life story continues to be a book penned with the ink of service, pages recounting devoted ministry to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Said Gilda, “I have been blessed to be surrounded by capable leaders



Brigadier General Andrew R. Harewood, a senior chaplain in the U.S. Army Reserve and Seventh-day Adventist minister, administered the oath of office at M. Gilda Roddy's April 17, 2023, commissioning service. Photo: Sheldon Kennedy, North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church *Sheldon Kennedy, for North American Division*

who have recognized my leadership skills and facilitated a space for me to grow. In our church there are few women in leadership. Still, I have often been invited to sit at the table. I value this opportunity and long to see [in the church] a permanent structure and placement where women lead."

"Chaplain Gilda is a great colleague. She is tireless and passionate about supporting and advocating for all chaplains," says Chaplain Angela Li, NAD assistant director for ACM. Military and church colleagues also affirm that Gilda encourages chaplains to focus on the purpose of their ministry and not lose sight of the mission of sharing Jesus Christ with others.

Re-envisioning Ministry Ahead

One challenge of chaplaincy is the many communities it encompasses. Chaplains who serve

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outside of Seventh-day Adventist spaces can appreciate the importance of engaging in critical listening. It is not enough to say we are "meeting people where they are"; we must also acknowledge differences in our communities of service. Gilda engages this topic with incoming chaplains who may notice differences between service in congregational ministry and pastoral care in chaplaincy settings.

In the U.S. Army Reserve Gilda will use her skills to move through many religious and interfaith communities. "Outside the Seventh-day Adventist Church, chaplaincy occurs in a pluralistic environment," said Gilda. "As a chaplain, my role is to provide spiritual care, a safe platform for an individual's spiritual needs and worship traditions. [Thus,] when confronted with beliefs that do not align with Seventh-day Adventist doctrines, I relate to the spiritual faith and find that safe space to minister."

"Jesus is our model. Think about it. He spent most of His ministry outside the synagogue. That is chaplaincy at its core," Gilda added. "As ministers, we have individual callings. When God called me to ministry, it was to minister where the people are. I think of chaplaincy as the work that we, as Seventh-day Adventists, are going to do as we prepare to usher in Christ's coming. Certainly the parish has a place, but what about the rest of the community? As human beings, we inherently long for a relationship with the Almighty. I encourage our ministers to be involved in their community, open to community needs, and [ready to] step into the gap to fill them. That's serving the way Jesus served."

To Be a Faithful Servant

Chaplain Gilda is forging ahead as a faithful servant. When she is asked about her call to military chaplaincy, the story goes back to that humble prayer by a young girl from Mauritius who is happy to serve God and country. "When I was approached with the opportunity to serve as a U.S. Army chaplain, the calling was clear: this is where I needed to be, growing as a leader, working to align and enhance systems to connect and advance common missions and service," said Gilda.

"When we put our trust in the Creator, understanding that we don't know what the end will look like, we can rest assured that we serve a God who knows the beginning and the end. I don't have to know where I am going; by trusting in God, although [my path is] at times painful, I am not lonely, because God is right there with me. When God calls, God already has a plan. Here I am! Send me!"

Dixil L. Rodríguez is serving as a chaplain in Texas.