Spiritual Fitness FAQ: For Commanders and Marines

What is Spiritual Fitness?
Spiritual Fitness is engagement with one’s spirituality necessary for building resiliency and for success as a Marine and citizen.

Why is it important?
CJCSI 3405.01 identifies Spiritual Fitness as a vital component of Total Force Fitness. ALMAR 033/16 is the Commandant’s message on Spiritual Fitness’s importance for building resiliency. Whether in times of peace time or combat, a Marine’s spirituality and the spiritual health of Marine units contributes to readiness, mission accomplishment, and personal and professional development.

How does the Marine Corps define spirituality?
Spirituality encompasses beliefs, values and distinct practices. It also refers to the one’s connectedness to a sense of belonging, purpose, and meaning. However, research shows that each individual tends to define spirituality differently. Therefore, spirituality is defined as the dimension of a Marine’s life that addresses the areas identified above.

Is Spiritual Fitness just another Marine Corps program?
What distinguishes Spiritual Fitness from other areas of fitness in the Marine Corps is that it is NOT a program. Rather, it is an engagement strategy for Marines to identify spirituality’s role in their personal and professional lives so that they can tend to it. Supported by research1, CJSCI 3405.01, and MCO 1500.61 (Marine Leader Development), Spiritual Fitness can be addressed through the following three areas of engagement:

• Mature beliefs and values that contribute to being a moral/ethical warrior and citizen.
• Spiritual Practices that increase resilience and spiritual growth.
• Spiritual experiences (personal or others) that identify and teach attributes that create meaning, purpose, and belonging.

Who is responsible for implementing Spiritual Fitness?
MCO 1500.61 and ALMAR 033/16 place the responsibility for integrating Spiritual Fitness on Marine leadership. In addition to its function in developing subordinates, Spiritual Fitness also plays a role in the development of healthy unit cohesion, morale, and esprit de corps necessary for effective combat teams. Chaplains support these efforts in their roles as advisors to the commander and through their responsibility to care for the spiritual needs of all Marines, regardless of their beliefs.

Effective Marine leaders creatively engage their subordinates and peers in any or all of the three dimensions above, leading to spiritually fit Marines, “honorable warriors, and model citizens the nation expects.”

1 Overall research on spirituality addresses one or more of these three aspects. See Puchalski, CM, et al. (2014) “Improving the spiritual dimension of whole person care. Reaching a national and international consensus.” Journal of Palliative Medicine, 17(6), 642-656 and “Spirituality and Trauma: Professionals working together.” National Center for PTSD, Department of Veterans Affairs. https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/care/spirituality_trauma.asp