



WHITE PAPER on
COMBAT VETERANS SUPPORT GROUPS

August 22, 2014

BACKGROUND: All Combat Veterans, male and female, return home from war changed to some degree. While some Combat Veterans and their family members are aware of their changed thoughts and actions, other Combat Veterans continue to function in the workplace and their home life much as before their wartime experience. However, during recent years it has become obvious that many Combat Veterans from World War II, Korea, and Vietnam have suppressed their anxieties, fears, stress trigger points, and pain without acknowledging these feelings to others as they have lived out their careers and lives.

The seeds for the need of a new ministry to Combat Veterans began in 2011 when Reverend/Pastor Bobby Farmer and Colonel Bill Collier USA (Ret), both U.S. Army Vietnam Combat Veterans, discussed with Pastor George Crow, a U.S. Air Force Vietnam Combat Veteran, about their plan to start a Combat Veterans Support Group (CVSG) at Northeast Presbyterian Church (NEPC) in Columbia, SC. Pastor Farmer was experiencing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms. With Pastor Crow's approval, the NEPC CVSG was established and the initial meeting was held April 20, 2011 on the NEPC campus. In attendance as founding members were Pastor Farmer, Colonel Collier, and Colonel Steve Vitali USMC (Ret), a Combat Veteran of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts.

From the outset, the NEPC CVSG desired to provide a safe forum for older WWII, Korea, and Vietnam Combat Veterans and to ensure a near term healing opportunity for those Veterans of conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. This CVSG has increased in membership and gained diversity of combat and educational experiences. Today, an approximate equal number of members served in WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

The structure of the NEPC CVSG was intentionally made informal and the only rule applied to all members was that their personal testimonies given during CVSG meetings would remain sealed. From three founding Combat Veterans in 2011 to over 40 veterans with an average weekly attendance of 18 in 2014, the NEPC CVSG has been tremendously successful in achieving its objectives.

The NEPC CVSG is the flagship for establishing CVSGs not only in South Carolina but throughout the United States. The successes of the NEPC CVSG spawned the establishment of Project Josiah Restoration Ministry (PJRM) of which a more in depth description is available for review on the internet at projectjosiah.org.

PURPOSE: To bring Combat Veterans together to strengthen, to share, and to improve their lives; to empower them to make choices using biblical principles; to heal themselves; and to enable them to help other Veterans.

OVERARCHING THEME: Combat Veterans helping Combat Veterans.

OBJECTIVES:

- To bring Combat Veterans together as a brotherhood to discuss and share.
- To improve Combat Veterans' lives by providing a platform to aid in resolving hidden wounds resulting from their combat service.
- To empower Combat Veterans to make choices using Biblical principles.
- To encourage Churches to open their facilities in support of Combat Veteran group efforts to help their Combat Veteran members.
- To enable Combat Veterans to help other Combat Veterans.
- To provide social, recreational, and charitable activities to promote the comradeship of its members.
- To connect Combat Veterans to VA benefits, services, and resources.
- To develop a Combat Veteran to Combat Veteran mentoring program.
- To support Combat Veteran ceremonies and activities.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

- Each CVSG will have a trained Facilitator. The Facilitator will be considered the CVSG leader.
- All other members and attendees will be considered of equal rank and status.
- Meetings will be conducted only in a Christian religious facility. All Combat Veterans, regardless of religious affiliation, are welcome and encouraged to attend any or all meetings.
- Meetings will be conducted weekly.
- Cell phone ringers should be turned off and the use of other personal electronics should not be in use during the conduct of each CVSG meeting.
- To create an environment and forum where members suffering from PTSD or other forms of stress can face their internal combat afflictions, and by interacting with other Combat Veterans they can begin their own healing process.
- Meetings will not have an agenda. Group members decide the subject matter during the current meeting.
- The CVSG is not a professionally trained organization and therefore the meetings cannot be considered as therapy. However, combat veterans talking to combat veterans is therapeutic.

- CVSG membership will consist primarily of Combat Veterans. Other Veterans and specified support personnel may be included based on interests and necessity.
- To learn and recognize when a Combat Veteran requires individual or higher institutional assistance and refer him or her accordingly.
- A newly established CVSG must contain a minimum of two Combat Veterans. Ten to fifteen members will be considered optimum for group effectiveness. However, no minimum or maximum membership limitations are necessary as long as the objectives are being reasonably pursued.
- CVSGs are safe places to talk, be heard, and be understood. Group members should maintain this atmosphere by treating each other with respect.
- Confidentiality of meeting discussions will be strictly observed. What is said during group meetings stays in the group. Group members should not talk about the specifics of group conversations outside of the group meeting.
- Members have the right to expect respect for who and what they are. When a member is sharing, all other members should give them their full attention. Each individual's opinions, attitudes, and beliefs are to be considered valid. Differences of opinion or other differences are worked out within the group process.
- All members, facilitators, and mentors will make every effort to ensure these above stated principles and rights for themselves and all others present.

MEETING METHODOLOGY: Not all Veterans within the group have seen direct combat; even so, their experiences and suffering are to be considered valid. As humans, we react differently to varying circumstances. Military service in itself has its own set of issues that can bind us together. The meeting methodology, or perhaps the lack of traditional or expected methodology, has led most CVSG members to applaud the unstructured format used in the CVSG meetings. The experiences, personalities, and attitudes of the group attendees play an important role in setting the dynamics of the overall meetings each week. Although each meeting is void of a stated agenda, the meetings are always full of interesting conversation.

It is often more interesting and beneficial to simply listen and not talk. During other meetings a topic or experience may tweak one's memory of a similar experience which is then shared with the group, if so desired. Any topic is acceptable. To enter into discussions or not is entirely an individual decision and no one is judged in any manner for their willingness to talk or not talk. We are here to listen. We are not here to "fix" anyone. We are simply delighted to be in the company of another Combat Veteran. As strange as it might seem to a non-Combat Veteran, many humorous events did occur and are most often the first ones remembered in our group setting. Hearing stories and experiences each week, whether humorous, happy, or difficult ones, brings home the feeling of how proud we are to be and have been an American serviceman or woman serving our country.

Those joining the CVSG for the first time listen to each attendee tell about his or her time in the service. Usually, this is no more than stating their name, branch of service, period of time spent in the service,

job or MOS, and combat unit. The newcomer will then be offered the opportunity to provide similar information about themselves. Or they may, at that time, simply say "I Pass" and that too will be okay.

CVSG meetings should be one hour in duration. If someone is providing sincere or serious testimony at or near the end of the hour, the meeting in that instance should be extended until that speaker has concluded what he wanted to say. Each meeting should be closed in prayer.

Weekly meetings reveal hope in Combat Veterans by seeing other Veterans living on life's terms and dealing with various symptoms of combat exposure. Many Combat Veterans have experienced, in varying degrees, one or more of the following symptoms to name the more prevalent ones: isolation, avoidance of social situations, numbed emotions, hyper alertness, depression, anxiety, conduct issues, and substance abuse.

Combat veterans who have experienced any of the above reactions to combat, and attend a CVSG, have an environment that allows them to develop strategies to cope and in several instances they have imparted this information by providing support to other Veterans who attend. The most important thing is that the Combat Veteran will realize that he/she is not alone, and there is hope for recovery.

A Combat Veteran Support Group Facilitator Manual is being written for use in training CVSG Facilitators.

BENEFITS:

- Brotherhood
- Comradeship
- Safety
- Confidentiality
- Trust
- Understanding
- Instilling Hope
- Healing
- Acceptance
- Service to other combat veterans

BIBLICAL DOCTRINE: Project Josiah Restoration Ministry is an evangelical Christian Ministry devoted to helping and providing a healing environment for Combat Veterans. We are led in all our efforts by the inerrant and infallible Word of God. We believe the Christian faith is articulated in the Apostle's Creed and we partner with fellow leaders and churches that also hold to the tenets of the historic summary of the Christian faith. We believe God established the local church as the primary setting in which lives are transformed for His glory and therefore we always meet in context of our local church partners.

IMPLEMENTATION:

Phase I: Advertising: Word of mouth was and still is the primary means by which the existence and tenets of PJRM is currently disseminated. The founder and almost single voice for advertising PJRM has been Chaplain Farmer during the past two plus years. As with any newly established organization, growth in the beginning is slow. During the past year, numerous written materials describing PJRM have been created as well as the design and implementation of the projectjosiah.org website. As pertinent documentation is developed, the materials are added to the website. For a more comprehensive understanding of PJRM, interested Pastors and Combat Veterans are encouraged to review all documentation on the website.

Phase II: Orientation with Pastors and facilitators: Chaplain Farmer will meet most anywhere, day or evening, with clergymen, those interested in joining a Combat Veterans Support Group, and/or anyone willing to assist in the establishment and/or sustainment of a CVSG. PJRM has an interesting and tremendously successful beginning and growth. With face-to-face meetings, Chaplain Farmer will be able to answer questions and provide additional information in greater detail than is contained in currently published documentation or on the website.

During these meetings, Chaplain Farmer will be interested in learning about the veteran population in a church and also in the near-by geographical area. Geographical areas with significant Veteran populations will more readily identify an obvious need while the more rural areas of South Carolina may have needs just as important. In the rural areas and their churches it may be more difficult to identify Combat Veterans and meet the start-up requirements.

Phase III: Initial CVSG Meetings: The CVSG established at NEPC has a core group of committed Combat Veterans who are willing to assist with start-up procedures in other churches. These Veterans have experienced the benefits of the openness and strong sense of trust that exists within their CVSG program and now are in a position to assist other Veterans on several levels wherever needed. Several of these Veterans will be available to attend the initial two or three meetings of a new CVSG and periodically thereafter whenever needed.

Phase IV: Site Support: A Site Support Team has been established to provide guidance and assistance to new CVSG programs. As the number of new CVSGs continues to increase, members of this Team will be on-call to render varying levels of support throughout South Carolina.

AFFILIATION:

- CVSG Facilitators will be trained by appropriate PJRM (Corporation) personnel.
- PJRM official publications will be provided each CVSG. Currently, this includes the *WHITE PAPER on COMBAT VETERANS SUPPORT GROUPS* and the *Project Josiah Restoration Ministry* brochure.
- Amenities such as the *PJRM* vehicle decal, the *PJRM* shirt or jacket sew-on patch, and the *PJRM* lapel pin will be issued within the constraints of available supplies.
- All official CVSG standards, policies, and publications will be approved by the Corporation before implementation.

- The Corporation will provide an initial orientation visit, implementation visits, and other periodic on-site support.
- Local CVSGs will be listed on the projectjosiah.org website.
- A formal vendor type booth can be available for display purposes upon request.

SUMMARY: The Project Josiah Restoration Ministry, spawned as a result of a very successful initial Combat Veterans Support Group at the Northeast Presbyterian Church, is devoted to helping and providing an opportunity and healing environment for Combat Veterans. Within the above stated objectives and environment, Combat Veterans can better accept and deal with their internal combat related hidden wounds and anxieties through interaction with other Combat Veterans. Thus, Combat Veterans helping Combat Veterans.

Refer to www.projectjosiah.org for additional information pertaining to CVSGs and the PJRM.

Proverbs 27:17 - ***Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.***