# Mental Health Integration for Chaplain Services (MHICS) training program

## Description and Course Overviews 2026-2027

Mental Health Integration for Chaplain Services (MHICS) is an intensive sub-specialty training that aims to better equip chaplains in the provision of care to Veterans and Service members with emotional and psychosocial challenges. This innovative training tailored to the contexts of VA and DoD chaplains uses formational, interactive, and applied methods to cultivate knowledge and skills in evidence-based psychosocial and integrative approaches to spiritual and pastoral care. Our aim is to support the ongoing formation of professional chaplains through the application of new and relevant skills in the contexts chaplains serve, whether clinical, training, or operational. Faculty and presenters include top experts from the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Defense, and academic settings.

The MHICS training program spans three academic semesters, each consisting of a course and participation in practicum small-group consultation calls. Each course requires completing distance modules, a written paper, and attending a multi-day training intensive. Each distance module is comprised of three 50-60-minute video didactics, readings, and interactive online assignments, requiring an estimated time of 8-12 hours each to complete. There is substantial flexibility in choosing when to complete the distance modules within guidelines provided to maximize small-group engagement.

Consultation calls focus on application of material through case examples. Regularly scheduled 90-minute small-group consultation calls using video conferencing occur during the second week of each distance module. All participants present actual (de-identified) cases during their small-group calls as part of learning how to integrate principles from different evidence-based modalities into their chaplain care – in particular, Acceptance and Commitment Training (ACT), Problem-Solving Training (PST), and Motivational Interviewing (MI) – and to enhance collaboration with interdisciplinary colleagues.

An overview of the MHICS training program is provided below (course content is subject to recurring change and improvement).

VA chaplains have the option of applying to Vanderbilt Divinity School (VDS) to pursue a Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) in Integrative Chaplaincy and earn academic credit while completing MHICS. VA chaplains admitted to the D.Min. and selected to participate in the MHICS cohort receive a D.Min. tuition discount. See divinity.vanderbilt.edu/dmin for more information and the final page of this overview for a comparison of the MHICS and D.Min. options. Timelines for the three MHICS courses are structured to coincide with VDS' academic terms.

Please e-mail any questions to the Integrative Mental Health program office at: IMH@va.gov

For more information, visit: https://www.mirecc.va.gov/IMH/MHICS.asp.

INTEGRATIVE MENTAL HEALTH

# First Course: Innovations in Care for Mental Health and Chaplaincy

The first course involves an on-campus kickoff training intensive that introduces chaplains to the MHICS training program, followed by six distance modules. Students examine historical and contemporary possibilities for integrating spiritual and psychosocial approaches to care and consider chaplaincy standards of practice, particularly in the context of interdisciplinary teamwork. They then consider and explore integration of principles from three evidence-based practices (EBPs)--Acceptance and Commitment Training (ACT), Motivational Interviewing (MI), and Problem-Solving Training (PST)--into their chaplaincy care. Consultation calls focus on integrating course materials and collaboration with interdisciplinary colleagues.

- **On-campus training intensive (August 25-28, 2026, subject to change):**
  - *Day 1: Developing the framework*
  - *Day 2: Emerging possibilities for chaplaincy and mental health care*
  - *Day 3: Formation through integrative chaplaincy*
  - *Day 4: D.Min. students complete extra day*

- **Module 1: Pastoral care and approaches to psychotherapy (2 weeks)**
  - *Unit 1.1: History of psychotherapy and pastoral care*
  - *Unit 1.2: Defining "evidence-based" in psychotherapy*
  - *Unit 1.3: Overview of contemporary psychotherapies*
  - *Practicum call*

- **Module 2: Chaplaincy standards of practice (2 weeks)**
  - *Unit 2.1: Spiritual assessment*
  - *Unit 2.2: Screening, referral, and informed consent*
  - *Unit 2.3: Developing research literacy*
  - *Practicum call*

- **Module 3: Spiritual care and innovations (2 weeks)**
  - *Unit 3.1: Spiritual practices and contemporary psychotherapy*
  - *Unit 3.2: Mindfulness*
  - *Unit 3.3: Possibilities for spiritual care in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)*
  - *Practicum call*

- **Module 4: Acceptance and Commitment Training (ACT; 2 weeks)**
  - *Unit 4.1: Introduction to ACT: The perils of language*
  - *Unit 4.2: The practice of ACT: Facilitating the process of change*
  - *Unit 4.3: Applications of ACT within chaplaincy*
  - *Practicum call*

- **Module 5: Motivational Interviewing Training (MI; 2 weeks)**
  - *Unit 5.1: Motivational Interviewing: An introduction*
  - *Unit 5.2: Motivational Interviewing: Fundamental skills*
  - *Unit 5.3: Motivational Interviewing: Considerations and techniques*
  - *Practicum call*

- **Module 6: Problem-Solving Training (PST; 2 weeks)**
  - *Unit 6.1: Problem Solving Training: An introduction*
  - *Unit 6.2: Problem Solving Training: Treatment components and tools*
  - *Unit 6.3: Problem Solving Training: Applications for chaplaincy*
  - *Practicum call*

*Course contents subject to change*

# Second Course: Signs and Symptoms in Mental Health and Chaplaincy

The second MHICS course provides six distance modules of intensive training on mental health problems that are prevalent among Veteran and Service member populations and the broader community. Students examine approaches to and contexts for mental health care and the etiology and treatment of mental health concerns, including mood disorders, substance abuse, serious mental illness, suicide, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and moral injury. Consultation calls focus on the application of ACT in chaplaincy care.

- **On-campus training intensive (January 12-15, 2027, subject to change):**
  - *Day 1: Applied EBP training*
  - *Day 2: Applied EBP training, intersections with suicide prevention and moral injury*
  - *Day 3: Applied EBP training*
  - *Day 4: D.Min. students complete extra day*

- **Module 1: Integrative care (2 weeks)**
  - *Unit 1.1: Mental health essentials*
  - *Unit 1.2: Essentials of group care*
  - *Unit 1.3: Integrative chaplaincy: Example of OCD care*
  - *Practicum call*

- **Module 2: Mood disorders, substance abuse, and serious mental illness (2 weeks)**
  - *Unit 2.1: Depression and mood disorders*
  - *Unit 2.2: Substance use disorders*
  - *Unit 2.3: Serious mental illness (SMI)*
  - *Practicum call*

- **Module 3: Suicide (2 weeks)**
  - *Unit 3.1: Suicide globally and in military and veteran populations*
  - *Unit 3.2: Suicide intervention strategies for chaplains*
  - *Unit 3.3: Religion, spirituality, and suicide*
  - *Practicum call*

- **Module 4: Upstream Suicide Prevention (2 weeks)**
  - *Unit 4.1: Human flourishing*
  - *Unit 4.2: Stress and resilience*
  - *Unit 4.3: Demographic considerations*
  - *Practicum call*

- **Module 5: Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD; 2 weeks)**
  - *Unit 5.1: Overview and evolution of PTSD*
  - *Unit 5.2: Evidence-based psychotherapy for PTSD*
  - *Unit 5.3: Military sexual trauma (MST)*
  - *Practicum call*

- **Module 6: Moral injury (2 weeks)**
  - *Unit 6.1: Perspectives on the history and development of the moral injury construct*
  - *Unit 6.2: Conceptualization, measurement, and assessment of moral injury*
  - *Unit 6.3: Moral injury care*
  - *Practicum call*

*Course contents subject to change*

INTEGRATIVE MENTAL HEALTH

# Third Course: Contemporary Conversations in Mental Health and Chaplaincy

In the third MHICS course, students examine topics at the intersection of chaplaincy, spirituality, and mental health care, including: links between religiousness/spirituality and mental health; methods of research and systematic inquiry for chaplaincy; the complexities and necessity of care for care providers, staff, and leadership; culturally responsive care; and suffering and resilience. Consultation calls focus on the application of PST and MI in chaplaincy care.

- **Module 1: Spirituality and linkages to mental health (2 weeks)**
  - *Unit 1.1: Examining the relationship between spirituality and health: Promises and pitfalls*
  - *Unit 1.2: Research growth and trends in spirituality and health*
  - *Unit 1.3: Spiritual care in a time of therapeutic technique*
  - *Practicum call*

- **Module 2: Research methods for chaplaincy (2 weeks)**
  - *Unit 2.1: Toward a research informed chaplaincy*
  - *Unit 2.2: Evaluating the impact of care: Mixed methods for systematic inquiry*
  - *Unit 2.3: Approaching research within chaplaincy*
  - *Practicum Call*

- **Module 3: Care for the care provider (2 weeks)**
  - *Unit 3.1: Stress response and self-care*
  - *Unit 3.2: Care for the care providers and leadership*
  - *Unit 3.3: ACT for the care provider*
  - *Practicum call*

- **Module 4: Caring for adults over the lifespan (2 weeks)**
  - *Unit 4.1: Guidance for chaplains working with couples*
  - *Unit 4.2: Guidance for chaplains working with families*
  - *Unit 4.3: Geriatric and palliative care*
  - *Practicum call*

- **Module 5: Psychosocial and developmental formation (2 weeks)**
  - *Unit 5.1: Childhood spirituality and the lifespan*
  - *Unit 5.2: Personality disorders*
  - *Unit 5.3: Cultural formation and spiritual care*
  - *Practicum call*

- **Module 6: Spirituality, suffering, and resilience (2 weeks)**
  - *Unit 6.1: A theological rethinking of trauma and suffering*
  - *Unit 6.2: Resilience*
  - *Unit 6.3: Human flourishing*
  - *Practicum call*

- **On-campus training intensive (November 30-December 3, 2027, subject to change):**
  - *Day 1: Applied EBP training*
  - *Day 2: Collaborative care*
  - *Day 3: Consolidation and next steps*
  - *Day 4: D.Min. students complete extra day*

*Course contents subject to change*

# Comparison of MHICS and Doctor of Ministry in Integrative Chaplaincy

The MHICS training program occurs over the course of three academic semesters. VA chaplains may apply to Vanderbilt Divinity School to pursue a Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) in Integrative Chaplaincy, with their work as part of MHICS going toward academic credit for the D.Min. The D.Min. entails a total of 36 credit hours, 24 of which can be earned while completing MHICS. In addition to completing all of the same work as the students only pursuing MHICS, D.Min. students complete extra readings, assignments (e.g., quizzes, exams), and practicum work (e.g., case write-ups, 90-minute peer calls on alternating weeks) – with all work contributing to letter grades (as opposed to the pass/fail work for MHICS only) submitted to the VDS Office of the Registrar at the end of each semester and contributing to a cumulative GPA. D.Min. students also attend one extra day as part of each of the three MHICS training intensives (i.e., 3.5 days instead of 2.5 days). Both D.Min. and MHICS students receive a MHICS completion certificate upon satisfactory completion of the three semesters of coursework. Students who begin only pursuing MHICS cannot later decide to pursue the D.Min. in Integrative Chaplaincy – they must apply and be accepted to the D.Min. through Vanderbilt Divinity School before the training begins. The table below compares the MHICS and D.Min. options.

| Year | Term | Coursework | MHICS | D.Min. (credit hrs) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1st Year | Fall | Innovations in Care for Mental Health and Chaplaincy<br>Practicum | ✓ | ✓+ (4)<br>✓+ (4) |
| | Spring | Signs and Symptoms in MH and Chaplaincy<br>Practicum | ✓ | ✓+ (4)<br>✓+ (4) |
| 2nd Year | Fall | Contemporary Conversations in MH and Chaplaincy<br>Practicum | ✓ | ✓+ (4)<br>✓+ (4) |
| | Spring | D.Min. Research Project Seminar I | | ✓ (4) |
| 3rd Year | Fall | D.Min. Research Project Seminar II | | ✓ (4) |
| | Spring | D.Min. Research Project Seminar III | | ✓ (4) |

+ Extra readings, assignments, and practica work required for D.Min. Only D.Min. students earn credit hours.