

State looks to get religious groups more involved with veterans

Written by Bob Johnson Associated Press

Aug. 1, 2013 10:54 PM |

montgomeryadvertiser.com

AUBURN — As veterans return home from Iraq, Afghanistan and other troubled places, many will seek help from spiritual leaders — and those leaders must be ready to help, multiple speakers said Thursday at a conference in Auburn.

About 170 church representatives and other members of faith-based groups attended the Alabama Veterans Well-Being Ministry Conference, aimed at getting churches and other religious groups more involved with helping veterans.

Douglas L. Carver, retired Army chief of chaplains, said about 40 percent of veterans with mental issues seek help from spiritual leaders, and faith groups need to know how to help.

Carver said veterans can face numerous problems, adding that an average of 22 veterans commit suicide each day. He said he hopes the faith-based leaders will help show returning veterans there are better ways than suicide to deal with their issues.

“We are trying to help bring them back from chaos to normalcy,” Carver said.

He said soldiers are trained that talking to a minister is “a safe place to go.”

He urged the faith-based leaders to provide that safe haven.

Dave Riley of Semmes was in the U.S. Coast Guard when he lost his hands and legs as the result of an illness suffered after his work as a rescue diver.

He said his faith was not strong when he went into the military, but faith has done much to help him recover.

Riley is the Alabama commander of the Disabled American Veterans and was the first Coast Guardsman to be awarded the DAV's Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year Award.

The award recognized Riley's outstanding achievements that include his community service, Coast Guard Auxiliary membership and athletic activities.

He said he faced many difficulties dealing with his disabilities and was helped by his wife and three children.

“Without my wife I wouldn't be here today,” Riley said. He said he was also helped by attending a faith-based conference in Colorado.

Riley said his faith has also helped him work with returning veterans as they deal with their problems.