

April 14, 2020 Town Hall

Col. Falzarano

Good morning Team Pete, and all of our knights stationed all over the world, for some of you it's not morning, it's afternoon, so good afternoon to you, and to our many mission partners as well who may be listening in, and our family members who are an incredibly important part of the Team Pete family and airmen and knights as well. We've been doing these Facebook town halls for several weeks as we move into month two of what's been for all of us, what's probably been the most unique, I think I can say that with little risk, that this has been the most unique challenge and unique circumstance that any of us have had to live through, lead through, cope through and adjust to. ...Most folks will tell you that humans are hardwired to resist change, and it's one of our defense mechanisms, that we like things the way they are. Even those who are innovative and want to try new things, there's a built in defense mechanism that tends to resist change, and over the last 4 to 6 weeks we have been going through a tremendous amount of change. Everything that we have known everything that we have accepted as normal that we've counted on, interactions we've counted on, day to day activities that we've counted on, simple things like buying food, all those things have been turned upside down and we've had to adjust to them. All brand new, every single day. So what I thought I'd do, I thought I'd bring in Chaplain Ward and Chief Simmons and have a bit of a discussion today about resilience and about some of the topics associated with resilience and maintaining that strong balance of mental, physical and spiritual balance in our lives, and maybe we can grow from that discussion and share some thoughts with all of you. So I'm going to turn it over to Chief Simmons first and then Chaplain Ward, for some words, and over the next 20-25 minutes we are just going to have a discussion about resilience and building Airmen that are built to last.

Chief Simmons

Good morning Team Peterson. Boss as you said it's truly incredible how fast things are changing all around us. The entire world is being reshaped right before our eyes, in an instant. If any of you are like me it's hard to know what things are actually going to stick, and what things are really just gonna pass as things get back to some sort of normal. Social distancing is strange, it is just not what we do as people as human beings. It's probably a good time to ask each other how we are adapting to this overnight change. This isn't something that happened gradually it's something that happened in an instant. It's probably a good time to do an individual mirror check as well and honestly assess how you are handling this, and if you need some tips to help you and your family adjust. Glad to have Chaplain Ward with us, to offer ways to keep us mentally sharp, spiritually fit and emotionally resilient. We are moving through what we know are tough times and uncertain times to come.

Chaplain Ward

Thank you Chief and thank you Colonel. for inviting me to be a part of the town hall today. I'm happy to join you today. Ways that wewhen we don't have a plan for some kind of discipline we can be led astray, but if we have a plan in place and we stick with it, even if we modify it along the way, we have a higher chance at success. So some of the ways that we can stay spiritually fit, especially during these changing times... there are a variety of people where art or

music.... tends to connect them so listening to ... can be very welcoming and strengthening.... that is one... scriptures for people of faith, but other holy writings or writings on spirituality can bring us closer to who we are as individual human beings. I have several books on spirituality that I keep around and I'll pick up and dive into... something and that can help.... I have a devotional that I keep next to my bed... There are lots of resources that you can pick up and read. Also listening podcasts. I know a lot of us during the last couple weeks and months have been unable to go to mosques, temples or churches. We are staying connected to our congregations by listening to live streams, and that can give us hope and inspiration. One other thing I'd like to share is praying or ..meditating. Perhaps for many of us, this may be a new thing, but prayer can be something that is very comforting to our souls and it also canto come alive. I know some folks may not practice prayer or meditation and they may ask "Well Chaplain how do I do that?" ...Opening up what you're thinking or feeling to your god and seeking to listen for a better understanding. I would invite people who are listening to come check out ... page. We put out daily videos that we create with moments of hope and inspiration from our team members, that you can go to to get words of hope and encouragement.

Chief Simmons

One of the things I've been pondering on is do we adopt or adapt. Those are two very different things. Part of that is active and part of it is a little bit more initiative. One of the things that I've been striving to learn more about, is the first thing we need to do when we are facing a new challenge and going toe to toe with a new adversary. We stand the best chance of overcoming and succeeding if we know and acknowledge two simple truths. The first truth would be what are we up against? And then the second is what's already behind us? What did we already overcome? So we aren't cutting ourselves short. Sizing up the competition and staying informed. We need to stay tuned in, weather it's through the Tuesdays and Fridays town halls, Knightly News, emails that are going out for things around the base, staying informed on what's available and what's going on in the world with regard to Covid, this pandemic, and how other folks are dealing with the situation. Then the second part is drawing confidence from knowing this isn't our first fight, we've been through things before. I had a good conversation with my children, who did not necessarily have a good recollection of what things were like after 9/11, what it was like when Ebola scared the world coming out of Africa, and what it was like to come out of recessions. and the peace that comes from knowing we aren't doing something that's completely foriegn, it's different for sure, and it's wider spread for certain, but we've had a fight before and we've come through it. That's comforting to me.

Col. Falzarano

Chaplain your team has been a help to many of the folks not only at Peterson but up at the Air Force Academy, as they get closer to the end of this week and graduating 1,000 new lieutenants. They've had some struggles up there as they figure out a new normal and adjusting to change and adapting, we appreciate your leadership up there. I think one of the things that everyone is struggling with is this different work life balance. We always talk about work life balance and what is that, is it achievable? How do you do it? It means something different for everyone. I'd be fooling you if I didn't tell you that at certain points in life that work life balance

means you are balanced every single day. Because some days it's impossible, some days there's a crisis involved in your work and you need to respond to that. So you may spend 20 hours doing work. Other days maybe there's a balance towards family life and those activities and so you have to figure out how to navigate that in total over the long term. But certainly as we've gone through this here, I think everyone's started to figure out a new work life balance and hopefully we are at a point of stability now. The one thing I would encourage everyone to look at, and I'm encouraged by, are the number of people that are trying to go and find something different to better themselves, to improve, to learn something. Whether it's learning a new language or they're going and finishing up that online class, or taking an opportunity to fill up a few of those extra minutes in the day. You know my mom was born in Italy, in the old school, the poorest of poor regions, and one of the things she would always tell me growing up, she would talk to me about idle mind. I won't tell you the exact quote, but I'm sure Chaplain Ward knows, but idle mind is probably one of the worst things for anyone. Only bad happens when you have an idle mind. I think if we go through and search and figure out what we do in this time, by the way some people are working even more, you know there are frontline medical folks and they have a different work life balance challenge and then some folks have the problem where they have a little more idle time. They have an idle mind and they have to figure out how to make that time productive and what to do with it. I'm encouraged by all the folks we talked to actually that are kind of getting out there and learning something new, bettering themselves which is great. What a great opportunity to say hey there was a crisis and I went out and made the most of it, and I improved myself, my family, my education, whatever it is that matters to you and your family.

Chaplain Ward

Well sir, you know it's interesting along those lines we are in a new season where we don't put on our uniform and get in our car and go to work for a ... ten hour day... and then return, ...our marriages, for those of us parents, our parenting, kind of... all in a different portrait that we are painting every day, so to have balance and to accept it, to embrace the fact that this is different and be able to nurture that parenting, that role we may carry, if we are married, our spouse, but also to continue to serve our country and be a part of our mission, it is all kind of a coming together tapestry. I've been doing a lot of praying lately, more so than normal, and I find myself praying for the world more than I've ever prayed for the world. You mentioned healthcare workers and that is very moving to me when I see it on the news. When I see these healthcare workers with bruises on their faces from where they've worn their masks most of a 24 hour shift, and ... my prayer life has increased because of that. Because I am so touched by the global need to reach out to one another. So I definitely resonate with what you're saying and I think that balance ...with our faith and our work and our family is all kind of coming together, there's pieces and parts of this experience that we aren't going to want to let go of. Maybe there are things that have been... before the Corona virus. I think we can learn from the suffering and the current crisis we face and we can become better because of it.

Col. Falzarano

Hey Chaplain, one quick question that was kinda raised in my mind, I know we've got a lot of Airmen, a lot of families right now that are struggling with loss. We have airmen that have, life goes on outside of Covid-19 and Coronavirus, and people are getting all sorts of health diagnosis, positive and negative, people are having babies, people are losing loved ones and family members, and in times where normally we would be together and comforting each other we can't do that now. For many families they are going through periods of loss and they are doing it totally alone, totally isolated from the rest of the family. I know folks have come to you with some of those concerns and I know you've heard those concerns and I wonder if you and Chief might have some thoughts as folks and families struggle with that really difficult time and being isolated at the same time.

Chaplain Ward

I can resonate with that as well sir, we are all still living. We all still have our family members who are having diagnoses of cancer and approaching surgeries and so forth, and in that isolation we can also feel more so lonely. A couple thoughts I have about that, I believe that in my tradition, the holy spirit can move through me, and I might think it's just intuition but it could very well be the holy spirit and if I wake up in the morning and I'm thinking of a particular person, let's say your exec Kendra, she's on my mind. Well I don't just let that fleet through, I'll send her a text or an email checking in with her asking her how's she's doing, how her husbands doing. I would encourage all of us to do that, when someone passes through our mind, especially when it's someone who lives alone, who might be isolated, don't allow that opportunity to pass without a quick check in text, or phone call because it truly might be god working through you to reach out to that person.

Chief Simmons

I'd like to add onto that. For certain the lack of connection is something that really individually affects me. I believe that I am a people person, I enjoy being around and being in contact, and interacting physically with people and being in their space. It's an area that I'm really struggling with. Virtual connection is helping, but I truly miss coming together, I truly miss congregating, I truly miss being in the presence of people. I probably took it a little for granted when I could do it any time I wanted to. There was always another day and another opportunity over the horizon to reach out and connect with people, and now when I walk by somebody I see them a little bit clearer than I did before. When I believed I walked by way too many people without giving them much of a second thought as to what's going on in their life and that's not just.. that's humanity. I think we are all gaining, I know that I am, a greater appreciation for the privilege and for having permission to connect with people. When before I could just do it how I saw fit. A year ago to the week I lost my mother, I had the opportunity, the privilege, and the permission to lay her to rest, to pay final respects in person. And our airmen are struggling because they are trying to make decisions with regards to if it's in the better interest or the greater good to go and pay final respects in person, and to lay your loved ones to rest in person. I'm so thankful I didn't have to struggle with that choice, that I had permission and I had the privilege to go and do that in person. I appreciate it even more today as I see Airmen and their families struggling with that decision, struggling with that choice, and even leadership struggling with granting that authority

to travel. That's the hardest thing that I've seen over this last month. The hardest decisions I've seen made is about connecting when it means most.

Chaplain Ward

...My mother meets with an oncologist, my brother is with her, it may be that I don't see my mother again on this side of heaven...that's something that I think about, that I deal with, and I have wingmen that are helping me deal with that.. to be in conversation with Team Pete and anyone whose going through that, please don't wrestle with those issues alone. Please call us during duty hours, you'll be connected to a live person, after duty hours the command post will get you with a chaplain, but let us help you with that, because there could be some spiritual tensionand we can help mitigate some of those feelings.

Col. Falzarano

Chaplain I appreciate that and I was about to ask about connecting and reaching out to you. By the way we have many more agencies on base that are helping as well. We have set up the capability to do virtual appointments through many of our counselors and many of our mental health professionals on base as a way to go and just having a sounding board for some of the things that all of our Airmen and families are thinking through. My hope is that by everyone hearing, you know it doesn't matter if you're a wing commander, or a wing chaplain, or you're the senior enlisted leader in the wing, that all of us are going through life at the same time. All of us are dealing with change. All of us are dealing with many of the issues that are part of real life. Every day here in my office over the phone or walking around i hear fantastic or great news, I hear depressing, the worst news you could hear, and everything in between you know all that is continuing to happen every single day for the thousands of Airmen families that call Peterson home. I just hope that everyone can realize and understand that whatever it is, whatever you're dealing with, someone else on peterson, I guarantee you, someone else is going through exactly the same thing. Someone may in fact have an answer or some experience or advice or an encouraging word and there is absolutely a light at the end of the tunnel. You know as I look at the Coronavirus numbers every day, I get a briefing about what's going on across the base, the state, the world at all of our locations, and every day there's some glimmers of hope out there, there's some positive news. We still have to continue to go and do what we are doing and be focused, but there's some rays of light out there. I just ask everyone that as you go through this and deal with the next challenge in front of you take solace in the small things, the rewards, the good things that have happened. For me, I went to the BX yesterday and they had pallets of toilet paper right in front, I say that now, in 20 minutes the BX is gonna be overrun. Two months ago I would not be talking on a facebook town hall about the amazing moment I had at the BX where there were piles of toilet paper right out front. But you know what, we are adjusting to a new normal, we are persevering, we are being resilient and we are figuring out how to get through all this together. Theres amazing teamwork going on, I'm encouraged by the innovation and the team work. I was at the commissary the other day at the drive I through pharmacy and our civil engineers in 20 degree weather are building a shelter with heat and light so that our pharmacy technicians can go and have a drive through pharmacy and protect many older retired Airmen, Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines that are getting prescriptions filled. So they are

working together and they're out there the entire day putting this together. It's up right now, and to come together as a team, just amazing stuff that you think about. I think every now and then you have to stop and say that wouldn't have happened before, none of those Airmen would have ever had that interaction, they never would have had that sense of accomplishment if not for the struggle we are trying to get through today together. There are some really incredible things going on as we work through this as an entire team and some things that you have to stop and appreciate, and go "Boy what an amazing group of Airmen out here, that are making this happen every day." I know that makes me incredibly proud, I'm proud to serve on that team. We've got a couple minutes so in gonna ask if Chief and Chaplain Ward would say a few final words.

Chief Simmons

I really appreciate the dialogue about everyone moving through life together at the same time, and that there's this big tapestry, this big canvas that everybody's painting on all at once, and it's not just a self portrait, but that it truly is a work of art that spans across everyone we touch. I really believe that how agile and how adaptive we are to these changes and times feed into and become our attitudes and ultimately our well being. Rather than asking how can we get through this thing today? I'm considering how will we be better because of this tomorrow. Our Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Kaleth O'Wright began his tour as CMSAF with a speech called put your mask on first, where he talked about taking care of your own well being and being fit to take care of something else. How fitting it is now that we talk about everyone putting on their mask. Putting on their mask first and doing their part to control what we can control, because this is not chaos this is controllable, and so I would ask everyone to do their part in controlling what we can control. I've got my mask, it says strength and preparedness, and I'm putting it on right now.

Col. Falzarano

Chief I'll give it to you, you've got a better mask than mine, once again.

Chaplain Ward

I'd like to leave you with an image. The image is that of a bone. We become stronger in the broken places and if a bone is fractured and it's set properly ... I also like you chief.. we will be changed for the better because of it. Several months ago when I arrived here I began offering during the Team Pete update, a question that I would give commanders and chiefs and shirts and leaders to kind of put in their back pocket so that when they engage other people they can ask deeper questions. Not just how are you doing but something deeper. The question that I would leave is this, what blessing in disguise... have emerged from the way things were. I do believe god is working in and through all these events. I do believe that we are all experiencing blessings, and maybe after this virus has ended we are gonna hang on to some of the things that have brought us closer together. I would also like to say thank you sir for your concern in my personal life, and that I pray for our leadership every single day. So with that let us pray. Most holy God, in a time of passover and And ramadan coming later this month, and people of all faiths coming together, becoming unified, becoming one. So we turn to you and pray for

your mercy and your strength and your healing. We thank you God for the healthcare workers around the world that are caring for people. We thank you for our military who are.... As we enter this new normal. Give us new eyes to see and ears to hear, that we may be a blessing to one another. I pray this in your most holy name, amen.

Col. Falzarano

Thanks team, thanks Chief, thanks Chaplain, it's great to be surrounded by great teammates, and both of you are that. I know the entire wing, the entire base and all our Airmen around the world appreciate your leadership. As we go forward I just want to reiterate to everyone that there are some glimmers of hope out there of perhaps getting back to some of the normalcy that we knew before. We are doing fantastic keeping our team safe and I ask that everyone continue the vigilance as we go forward, and be patient. I'd ask that everyone continue to find ways to improve themselves and find ways to make healthy connections with others around them and purposefully take some time to reach out and see how folks are doing, try something new, try to better yourself improve and in doing that, all of us are going to emerge from this time, this one period, this one season in life better than we would have been otherwise in many ways. I know that for sure I'm going to be getting out around the base. I know our chief is gonna be talking and calling up many of our squadrons, our ops centers out there around the world, so don't be surprised if you pick up the phone and its General Raymond on the phone don't hang up, say hi, talk to him, it's not a prank call, please answer the phone. I'm gonna take the opportunity here I see the sun peaking out and hopefully it'll be warming up a little bit, and take the opportunity to get out and see some of you around at least on Peterson and see what you're doing and thank you for your hard work. With that as always team I'm proud to serve alongside you and I know I have a couple teammates here invested in making sure that all of you are built to last.