

Fire Department Chaplaincy

OBJECTIVE

To provide for the full range of fire department personnel needs through the establishment of a comprehensive chaplaincy program within the Fire Department.

APPOINTMENT

Because of the major risks and constant stresses faced by fire service personnel in the line of duty, a chaplain will be appointed to function within the Fire Department.

The Chaplain will be appointed by written order of the Fire Chief.

QUALIFICATIONS AND TRAINING

1. The individual appointed to the position of Chaplain should be:
 - a. An ordained member of the clergy or firefighter supported by their church for such a ministry
 - b. In good physical health
 - c. Interested in the fire service
 - d. Prepared to serve in a crisis zone
 - e. Willing to commit the time necessary to make the ministry effective.
 - f. Committed to learn the skills necessary to effectively relate to and minister to firefighters and EMS personnel.
2. To the extent possible, the Chaplain will be given the opportunity to meet with members and staff of the department, visit the stations and receive guidance in understanding fire department organizations and procedures. Training will also be provided to help him protect himself and to be able to render proper help to assist members on the emergency scene.
3. After appointment the chaplain will be issued the following equipment:
 - a. Standard turnout gear, including coat, pants, boots, gloves and helmet with "Chaplain" markings.
 - b. Chaplain's badge, Identification card, and carrying case, pager and business cards.

DUTIES OF THE CHAPLAIN

The below listed duties constitute only a brief summary of what may actually be required in any situation that may be encountered. The Chaplain must remain constantly alert and sensitive to needs and the means he must employ to meet those needs.

1. Emergency Situations

The Chaplain will respond when contacted by dispatch or fire department personnel, or at his own discretion, and will report at the scene to the officer in charge. When at the scene, the Chaplain will be under the command authority of the officer in charge. The Chaplain should respond as follows:

a. To the scene when:

1. A working fire of second alarm or greater is in progress.
2. A critical incident is in progress.
3. A critical injury or death to a firefighter is reported.
4. The incident involves a victim that is a member of a fire department member's family.
5. Whenever the incident commander determines that the services of the Chaplain may be of value in the ongoing emergency operation. This may include situations where:
 - (a) The victim or family is highly emotional or unstable
 - (b) Care is needed for the family of the victim while treatment is underway
 - (c) The victim or the family requests the services of a chaplain or clergy
 - (d) The incident commander feels the presence of the Chaplain would be of benefit to the victim or to department personnel

b. To the hospital when:

1. The incident commander or paramedic providing treatment determines that the victim or family may need support or counsel.
2. The victim's family needs to be located and notified.
3. A member of the fire department is the victim.

2. Follow-up Actions

a. On-the-scene Duties:

1. Provide appropriate victim assistance to free operational personnel for firefighting duties.
 - (a) Comfort and counsel
 - (b) Referral to appropriate community agencies for assistance
 - (c) Help contact persons, insurance agents, family members, etc. *In all cases, the Chaplain will find out a victim's church or religious preference and attempt to notify the pastor or church.*
2. Provide appropriate assistance to firefighters engaged in firefighting activities.
 - (a) Watch for signs of physical or emotional stress
 - (b) Assist in providing firefighting needs (water, rest, etc.)
 - (c) Advise command whenever it is felt that a firefighter or paramedic is in need of being relieved from emergency operations.

- b. Post emergency Duties
 - 1. Conduct follow-up to insure victims are receiving necessary assistance.
 - 2. Insure firefighter's needs are met in the areas of on-the-job injuries, critical incident stress, etc

3. Routine Duties

- a. Duties within the fire department.
 - 1. Visit all stations and shifts.
 - 2. Visit hospitalized department members and members of their families.
 - 3. Participate in recruit training as suggested by the training officer.
 - 4. Be available for helping or counseling members of the department in times of stress or difficulty.
 - 5. Assist when requested by any division of the department in their programs.
 - 6. Attend fire department functions.
 - 7. Conduct funeral/memorial services as needed and requested.
 - 8. Be a member of the Critical Incident Stress Debriefing team.
 - 9. Be on-call on a twenty-four hour a day basis.
- b. Duties outside the fire department.
 - 1. Represent and interpret fire department goals and concerns to the churches and religious institutions in the community.
 - 2. Assist when requested with public events or public information needs.
 - 3. As time permits, and as requested, conduct extended ministry to victims and their families.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR THE CHAPLAINCY

- 4.1** *The Chaplain does not replace the home church pastor, but seeks to support the concerns of every church for its members who may be in professions with special risks or needs. Moreover, the Chaplain must be for the advantage of every member of the department, regardless of his or her nationality, race, sex, or religion.*
- 4.2** Any communication a person makes to the Chaplain is on a strictly confidential basis and will not be released to department members or any other person(s). Any fire personnel may go to the Chaplain without having to notify his or her supervisor or anyone else.
- 4.3** Any fire department officer or member (including administrative staff) who is made aware of any situation which may need the response of the Chaplain may contact the Chaplain directly. Fire department administration will keep current telephone numbers for the Chaplain. The Chaplain may also be contacted through fire department administration if necessary, or desirable. Examples of situations where the Chaplain may be contacted include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Death, injury to, or hospitalization of a fire department member.
 - b. Death, injury to, or hospitalization of a fire department member's spouse or child.

- c. Death in a fire department member's close family member (i.e. any family member covered under the department's death leave provisions).

Conclusion

The chaplain of the fire department is one of the most vital positions in the fire service. The chaplain is next to the pulse of the department. It is a job that is demanding, confidential, trusting, and needful for the lives of the firefighters and their families. The fire department administrator can be assured that it is one of the finest and most needed programs that can be started.

This has been a brief overview of beginning a fire service chaplaincy program. There are many areas that could be added, and many not considered to be the needs for your department. The next step is to weigh, consider, and determine your needs and wants. Then institute the chaplaincy program in your department.