

# Guidelines for setting up a Chaplaincy Program

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The last few years I have seen a tremendous growth in all types of chaplaincy programs. I have witnessed good programs destroyed in a very short time. Why? There are several answers to the question why. I will cover just a few, and hopefully this information will spare you the trial and errors phase that so many experience.

1. One of the most important tools that you will use is the survey. It is very important to send out a general survey, which will help you identify the needs of the department. I have found that every department will have different needs. What will work with one department will not work as well with another. Each department will have its own personality, and history.
2. It is important to recognize that a uniform, rather it is fire, police, or paramedic, is something that is earned by those who wear them. A common mistake, which will severely hurt your efforts, is to ask for a uniform or badge. In time, after you have proven your genuine concern for those you represent, it will be offered to you. It is important that you show you are willing to work and earn the uniform. I have witnessed chaplains ruin their image because of this one important issue.
3. I have heard it said that you could be effective working both police chaplaincy and jail ministry. I have yet to see this work. The point I would like to make is to stay focused on your area of responsibility. It is easy to stretch yourself too thin, which will cause your program to become ineffective. One way to be successful in a multi-chaplaincy program is to delegate specific chaplains to specific areas of ministry. An example would be to have a chaplain assigned to paramedics, and another assigned to fire and rescue etc. It will take strong leadership to make this work.
4. You must be willing to share authority and leadership positions within your program. This is true especially for large programs. Rather than religious, race or gender, you must be willing to share in your leadership roles. This can be accomplished by having a term limit on your chief-chaplain and asst-chief-chaplain positions as well as department heads. I would rotate based on race and religious affiliation. I have watched a good program lose its credibility because the minority group did not have equal representation within the chaplaincy leadership. If not handled correctly you will become ineffective in reaching the department.
5. You cannot separate a chaplain from his theological training. This is probably one of the hardest areas of your chaplaincy program to manage. How well you handle this will depend totally upon the caliber of chaplains you have. For instance, if you are Baptist in theological belief, then you will have to approach a person from another religious belief with extreme care. In other words you are not to push your specific doctrine or belief, yet at the same time you want to be

sincere about what you believe. If you are counseling a person then you will use the theological training that you have. If I knew a person had a particular belief or religious view then I would try and send them to someone who held the same views. If we did not have a chaplain of their persuasion then I would recommend them to a local pastor who held their doctrine view. You may not understand this statement, but a chaplain should not use their position to build their church membership. If a person shows interest in attending your church then it is ok to invite them. The important thing is to let it be of their choice.

6. Avoid taking sides in problems with-in the department. A chaplain should always stay neutral. This means you should offer support such as prayer, but any personnel involvement or opinions will only lead to your loss of creditability.

7. Finally, four important “abilities” to remember. Availability, visibility, adaptability, and credibility. These are four keys to having a successful chaplaincy program.

This is a very short list of things to remember when you start your chaplaincy program. There are many more things you will need to know other than what's listed. If you approach you program with prayer and a pure desire to help others then you will succeed. Always remember it's not about you, it's about Jesus, and touching people's lives for him. Do not become discouraged if you make mistakes along the way. Learn from them and push forward. If you have any questions or comments please let me know.