

FIRE CHAPLAINCY: THE PROMOTION OF RESILIENCE-BASED PASTORAL CARE

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PASTORAL THEOLOGY AND PASTORAL COUNSELING

BY

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BRITE DIVINITY SCHOOL

Fort Worth, Texas

May 9, 2009

To the Dean of the Brite Divinity School:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Cameron L. Brown entitled "Fire Chaplaincy: The Promotion of Resilience-Based Pastoral Care."

I have examined the final copy of this paper for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Ministry

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We have read this professional paper  
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Accepted

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Dean, Brite Divinity School

DEDICATION

TO

Gary, whose hope, patience, and love have under girded this project

and my life

and

to my daughter

Courtney, whose joy, goodness, and smile

make my life rich and full,

and

to my Grandmother

MaMaw Ruby

Whose precious time and fervent prayers helped me grow in grace and awareness that

I represent the comforting presence of God to those in need.

Her love of God and neighbor inspired me to

love and accept

unconditionally.

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I thank Dr. Jeter for his kindness and for giving me an opportunity to share my vision. His faith and his willingness to help students succeed go beyond measure. His skillful persuasion and brilliance kept the project on track.

I thank Dr. Feille for sharing my vision and being a mentor throughout my whole academic program. He opens the door to the academic world so students may enter to learn the true meaning of strength-based pastoral care so they will be well-equipped to take this ministry out into the world.

Most of all, I thank Gary, my source of strength and stability. He never gave up on me and always listened to my joys and my concerns. My dear husband believed in me when I did not believe in myself. Gary, thank you!

## ABSTRACT

Project Director: Dr. Joseph Jeter. This paper identifies the chaplain's role in promoting preventive resilience-based pastoral care through supportive resources and community networks. This paper shares information gathered through observation, personal experience, and a literature review that firefighters are more resilient because of their strong sense of community, and their commitments to God, each other, and their families.

In the first chapter, the author writes about personal experiences and observations that lead to an interest and study of the fire chaplain's role in promoting resilience in fire fighters and their families .

The second chapter, entitled " Fire Chaplaincy" shares a historical perspective and addresses the duties and responsibilities of a fire department chaplain.

The third chapter, entitled "A Biblical Example for Resiliency" gives a biblical framework for the promotion of resiliency. The literature review explores the stories of Abraham and Sarah and surveys ways in which connectedness to God , family, and community have helped families rebound from life's challenges.

In the fourth chapter, entitled "Theoretical Grounding: Froma Walsh's Foundations of a Family Resiliency Approach" one finds the definitions of "resilience" and "connectedness" that frame the discussion on key interactional processes that empower families to be resilient.

The fifth chapter, entitled “Implications for the Ministry of Preventive Pastoral Care with Firefighters and their Families” gives the practical aspects of the chaplains’ roles in promoting resilience in firefighters and their families. The reader will find along with some challenges that firefighters and their families face, an overview of strength-based programs such as Critical Incident Stress Management and Fire Families Support and Awareness Programs.

The final chapter, entitled “Conclusion” addresses the need for a “Fire Chaplain Survey.” The purpose of this survey will be to learn from other chaplains’ experiences about their specific preventive pastoral care programs and community resources that promote resilience. The fire chaplain is instrumental in implementing stress-hardy programs. There is great strength and resilience in the chaplain-firefighter relationship and the movement toward more strength-based programs are endless.



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory (Isaiah 61:1-3, NRSV).<sup>1</sup>

These inspirational words written by the Prophet Isaiah have inspired many throughout history. Today, many chaplains consider these divinely inspired expressions to be the cornerstone of their ministry to firefighters, families, and community residents. When faced with adversity, the prophet asks the community to turn to God for comfort and guidance. Equally important, Isaiah acknowledges God's divine call to go into the world providing that comfort and encouragement to those trying to cope with the harsh conditions.

God anointed the author of Isaiah 61 to proclaim his ministerial identity of pastoral caregiver or chaplain. The prophet's pastoral duties are to: (1) "bind up the brokenhearted," (2) "comfort all that mourn," (3) "give them a garland instead of ashes," (4) give "the oil of gladness instead of mourning," and (5) "give the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit."<sup>2</sup>

Throughout history, many individuals and communities have sought spiritual and emotional support. They recognize a higher power other than themselves, and this is true whether the threat

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne Meeks, ed., *The Harper Collins Study Bible* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1989), 1101.

<sup>2</sup> Words from the Prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 61:1-3a.

is disease, fire, war, or other crises. Often the spiritual support in these situations came from chaplains, be it military, fire, hospital, or police.

Although chaplaincy has had a long tradition and history with the military and medical community, the setting of fire department and emergency services is somewhat new to chaplain ministry. The chaplain for a fire department may be an ordained clergyperson or a layperson, male or female, firefighter or paramedic. Fire chaplains take on the role of providing spiritual and emotional support to those in the fire service and those affected by emergency crises.

Emergency workers face extreme environmental and physical conditions where human suffering is witnessed daily. When they encounter death, suffering, and other tragic situations, emergency workers frequently think about their own mortality; yet they continue to risk their lives to save others. After a tragic incident, how are they able to climb back onto their fire trucks and speed off to rescue citizens in need?

Firefighters are better equipped to do this line of work because most are stress-hardy and have a strong sense of calling. Their ability to rebound from the pressures of emergency work is often dependant upon an individual's connectedness to God and one's co-workers. The strong sense of community within the fire service, much like a faith-based community, provides an environment conducive for a chaplain to provide pastoral care. The chaplain plays a fundamental role in the promotion of resilience through the services that he or she provides. Therefore, the primary focus of this project is to identify the chaplain's role in providing and promoting resilience-based pastoral care through supportive resources and community networks.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Froma Walsh defines resilience as "The capacity to rebound from adversity strengthened and more resourceful. It is a process of endurance, self-righting, and growth in response to crisis and challenge. The qualities of resilience enable people to heal from painful wounds, take charge of their lives, and go on to live fully and love well." Froma Walsh, *Strengthening Family Resilience* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1998), 4, 84, 106.

Models for ministry are as varied as fire departments themselves. Some are quite simple, with a single chaplain volunteering to serve a single department. Others are much more developed with several chaplains serving multiple agencies. The educational and experiential levels of fire chaplains are wide-ranging. There are many with seminary degrees while others have not gone beyond their high school educations. In some settings, the fire chaplain is a local minister who volunteers his or her time to serve the firefighters and their families in that community. Another location might have a firefighter answering God's call to serve as chaplain only to firefighters within his or her department.

Today's trained chaplains provide an intentional and purposeful plan to care for firefighters and their families. This plan also expands to the community where chaplains may provide on-scene support to residents during and following a traumatic event. A chaplain's background and varied experiences may help or hinder his or her ability to promote resilience within the fire service. For example, fire chaplains who believe their sole purpose is to proselytize soon discover that firefighters stop inviting them to visit fire stations.

The fire chaplain is not primarily a religious advisor, although, in most cases he or she is a member of the clergy. A properly trained chaplain may direct his or her pastoral care in ways that are not faith-tradition specific; yet, they serve the specific needs of an individual over and beyond the chaplain's religious expression. The office of chaplaincy often becomes a parent faith community to those facing traumatic events or the challenges of balancing family life with work.

Beginning with a calling to serve and an appointment to the office of chaplaincy, fire chaplains are trained in fire service culture and operations, pastoral care, crisis intervention,

comprehensive Critical Incident Stress Management, and grief support.<sup>4</sup> In their ministry to firefighters, chaplains have many opportunities to use their acquired knowledge and skills to promote a healthy and holistic lifestyle.

A holistic approach encompasses the complete lifestyle of an individual: emotional, physical, social, and spiritual. Firefighters face traumatic situations where their concern for a stranger's safety often outweighs concern for self. The death or injury of a co-worker is viewed as a life-changing event. When firefighters look death in the face and their dreams are shattered, where do they turn?

For the past twenty-nine years, I have had both the honor and privilege to be a member of one of the most respected professions in the United States. My roles as firefighter and fire chaplain have made it possible for me to observe the interpersonal relationship patterns of firefighters with their nuclear families and their peers.

In 1984, I observed an increase in the number of marital separations and divorces occurring within the Fort Worth Fire Department.<sup>5</sup> A relationship cycle seemed to be occurring: Many firefighters were divorcing their current spouses, marrying a new partner, divorcing, and marrying yet another. In fact, some firefighters have two, three, or four wedding albums filled with poignant reminders of their failed relationships. Yet, others have albums filled with joyful snapshots that exhibit a loving relationship with their first and only partner.

Throughout the family life cycle, most human beings face trials and tribulations. Some families grow closer while others are torn apart. My roles as firefighter, fire chaplain, and wife

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<sup>4</sup> Instructors approved by the Federation of Fire Chaplains teach Basic and Advanced Fire Chaplain classes throughout the United States and Canada.

<sup>5</sup> In 1984, many firefighters talked with me at the fire station where I was assigned as a firefighter. Although I had no formal education in pastoral care and counseling, they trusted me and openly discussed their familial relationships.

of a fire captain, have given me unique insights into relationships. The fire service is a peer-oriented familial subculture where firefighters spend one-third of their lives with their co-workers. Due to the extended time working together, these members experience a full twenty-four hour routine. Therefore, time together allows for deep personal disclosure that involves all of life's challenges and experiences.

My roles as chaplain and firefighter give me the opportunity to work with a cross section of people from tremendously diverse cultures. Throughout the years, I have observed and listened to the ways in which relationship status is wide-ranging and ever-changing. Most firefighters are involved in long-term monogamous relationships: Many are married, some cohabitate, some have gay or lesbian partners, and others are single. Most firefighters live with a significant other and their biological or adopted children, while others live as a parent or stepparent in a blended family setting. Since fire chaplaincy is ecumenical by nature, chaplains serve all individuals regardless of their relationship status, sexual orientation, or religious affiliation.

In 2004, I observed a paradigm shift in domestic responsibilities. Traditionally on days off from the fire station, most firefighters worked a part time job while their partners managed the households and cared for their children.<sup>6</sup> As I interacted with firefighters and their families in a variety of professional and social settings, when questioned, many firefighters said their partners worked outside the home. I was pleasantly surprised when the majority talked about their joys in being the primary caregiver for their small children.

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<sup>6</sup> In 1994, a program entitled "Fire Families" was developed. The premise for this program was to provide an educational program for fire recruits and their family members. While newly hired firefighters attended the Fort Worth Fire Academy, their significant others met with a facilitator for three educational sessions. In the beginning, only the partners of the recruits were invited. Later, recruits were encouraged to invite their partners, parents, siblings, and children. Participants, not the fire chaplain, defined the term "family." In 2004, as in previous years, participants were asked, "What will your firefighter partner do on his or her days off from the fire station?" Most stated, "He or she will be caring for our child or children while I work." Although, there has been no quantitative research to support these verbal findings, it seems that the trend of firefighters caring for their children continues. To date, more than six hundred firefighters and their families have participated in the Fire Families Program.

Max Stackhouse in his analysis of the American family categorizes the work of household members as (1) the work they do outside the home; (2) the work they do inside the home; and (3) the work of “forming the next generation.”<sup>7</sup> He further asserts: “We find many efforts to bring an increase of equality between men and women in the way they allocate tasks of the household, now the locus is not of production but of reproduction, consumption, and altered childrearing.”<sup>8</sup>

In earlier times, many firefighters bragged about their off-duty adventures. They worked part-time or joined their fellow firefighters at local bars while their partners managed the households. Although they have always had a strong desire to help others, for many years, firefighters barely made enough money to support a single person household.

Historically, in the United States many of the first firefighters were poor Irish and Scottish immigrants who fled the great potato famine. Many factories and storefronts displayed signs that read “NINA”—No Irish Need Apply.<sup>9</sup> Many Irish immigrants had jobs that were dangerous and dirty—law enforcement and firefighting. Those choosing to become civil servants—police officers and firefighters were hungry for work of any kind.

Today, firefighters are financially compensated for their high-risk jobs. In fact, over the past twenty-five years, most municipalities have doubled fire service salaries. Consequently, more income affords an individual the privilege of spending more quality time with his or her family. Most are taking their familial relationships more seriously, and with the added expense of childcare and inflation, have little time or desire to engage in their previous stereotypical “party hardy” firefighter activities.

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<sup>7</sup> Max L. Stackhouse, *Covenant and Commitments: Faith, Family, and Economic Life* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 65.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>9</sup> Susan Farren, *The Fireman's Wife* (New York: Hyperion, 2005), 11.



Based upon personal contact, this new generation of firefighters appears more resilient to job-related and familial stressors due to three factors: (1) their commitment to spend more time with their families; (2) their connectedness with co-workers; and (3) the tradition of community within the fire service.<sup>10</sup> The attempt of this project is not to recapitulate the variety of theories concerning resilience, but rather to put forward some observations that been helpful in shaping my understanding.

First, firefighters are committed to their careers and their families. Firefighters are caring individuals who risk their lives to rescue strangers. Many say with delight, “We run into burning buildings when others are running out!” Theologically speaking, the field of emergency services, like chaplaincy, may be described as a “diakonic” vocation or “the merciful service of neighbor.”<sup>11</sup> The profession of helping others is one of the most verbalized reasons why job satisfaction is high and the attrition rate is low. In fact, most firefighters serve their communities thirty to thirty-five years before retiring.

Most mothers and fathers will proudly say their child learned the idea of merciful service and love at home. Many firefighters are committed to helping their families of origin, nuclear families, and other extended members. Like the general population, there has been an increase in the number of firefighters caring for their elderly parents and grandparents. Many are part of the “sandwich generation;” one in which they are supporting both young children and elderly parents in the same household. Those facing these predicaments often call upon their chaplains for referrals to community resources for their elderly or sick relatives.

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<sup>10</sup> Froma Walsh refers to “connectedness” as a key family process in resilience, *Family Resilience*, 106.

<sup>11</sup> “Love, care, and concern for those in need” is the definition of diakonic mercy/love. Further, “diakonia may be described as the Christian service of neighbor.” Matthew C. Harrison, *Theology for Mercy* (St Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2004), 3.

Fortunately, in dual-earner relationships, many off-duty firefighters have both the time and resources to help family members. Those with preschool children are able to be equal partners in care-giving efforts. Those with school age children may jointly provide transportation, help with homework, and volunteer at school. Countless firefighters are volunteer coaches for their children's athletic activities and youth sponsors at their churches.

Taken as a whole, less time working equals more family time. When individuals are intentional about spending quality time with their families, they are better able to share meals and converse about the joys and challenges of daily life. William Doherty views families as "communities of meanings and memories."<sup>12</sup> Moreover, he affirms that the majority of American families believe "family dinner is one of the most important ways to maintain family communication; and most believe that regular dinners contribute to children's success in school."<sup>13</sup> However, a 1995 survey found that most nights less than a third of American families are blessed with the opportunity to share an evening meal.<sup>14</sup>

Whether we share meals in our households or our church homes, we are taking time to connect with God, our families, and our neighbors. When we break bread together and share the cup, we are reminded of God's abundant mercy, grace, and blessings. William McElvaney writes:

Meeting with the risen Lord at the heart of worship must never be a dead end! It is a turnabout, a transformation point for the outward journey into a needy and hurting

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<sup>12</sup> William J. Doherty, *The Intentional Family: How to Build Family Ties in Our Modern World* (United States: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc, 1997), 22.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

world. Home is not only where you go for rest, belonging, and nourishment; it is where identity and mission are formed and from which we go to serve.<sup>15</sup>

Table fellowship at church, home, and workplace promotes effectual communication and connectedness between its members.<sup>16</sup> The question arises: “Is there a correlation between an individual’s ‘connectedness’ to God, family, and community and one’s ability to rebound from stressful life events?” Theologically speaking, the answer is “yes.” When we intentionally make time to unite with God and our families, we are transformed into stress-hardy people, who are better prepared to face the hardships of life.

Another goal for this project is to explore fire chaplaincy programs that promote emotional, physical, and spiritual hardiness. In this introductory chapter, from a personal perspective, I have written about experiences and observations that lead to an interest and study of the fire chaplain’s role in promoting resilience in fire fighters and their families.

In chapter two, fire chaplaincy will be explored from a historical perspective. After a brief chronological overview, the focus will shift to the fire chaplain’s roles and responsibilities.

The biblical and theological framework for the promotion of resiliency will be addressed in chapter three. The literature review surveys ways in which connectedness to God, family, and community have helped families such as Abraham and Sarah rebound from life’s challenges. Throughout this work, I will explore the relationship between connectedness to God, family, and community as they relate to resilience; however, there will be no attempt to synthesize the biblical, theological, and secular theories.

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<sup>15</sup> William K. McElvaney. *Eating and Drinking at the Welcome Table: The Holy Supper for All People* (Atlanta: Chalice Press, 1998), xiii.

<sup>16</sup> Throughout my career in the fire service, I have observed members who eat together and engage in conversation at the table have less workplace conflict and better communication than those who eat alone. In the fire service, eating meals together is coined “Being in the boarding house.”

Chapter four describes the theoretical grounding and the identification of key secular interactional processes that empower families to rebound from disruptive life challenges. The theoretical foundation for this study is based on Froma Walsh's "strength-oriented approach" grounded in Murray Bowen's systems theory.

Chapter five integrates the key points that relate to the chaplain's role in promoting resilience-based pastoral care to firefighters and their families. The reader will find along with some challenges that firefighters and their families face, an overview of preventive pastoral care programs, such as Critical Incident Stress Management and Fire Families.

Firefighters face many internal and external stressors at home and at work. The tapestries of their lives are interwoven with threads of tragedy and despair. Nevertheless, fire chaplains have spiritual, emotional, and physical resources that may be interwoven into a weakened cloth that will strengthen the tapestry to withstand the trials and tribulations of life.

## CHAPTER 2

### FIRE CHAPLAINCY

The image of a chaplain, draping a cloth or blanket around the shoulders of a shivering person, suffering from the cold, harsh conditions of life, leaves an indelible imprint on the minds of many. Centuries ago, on a bone-chilling, wet night, Saint Martin of Tours, removed his warm cape and draped it around the shoulders of a shivering homeless person. Thus, the word “chaplain” originates with the Medieval Latin *cappella*, meaning cape, and specifically refers to the one worn by Saint Martin. This famous cape was preserved and displayed in a small building, which came to be known as the *chapel*. The “chaplain” was initially the guardsman of the chapel, but the roles of the chaplain soon expanded to meet the diverse needs of the community.<sup>17</sup>

Today, the fire chaplain’s cape may be a blanket gently placed around the shoulders of a cold, frightened family, standing by helplessly, as angry flames consume their home. The “cape” may be a chaplain’s jacket placed underneath the head of an injured firefighter who fell from a two-story roof. The cape may be a firefighter’s bunker coat gently placed over a small child’s body, thrown from a vehicle onto the freeway. It may be a prayer requesting God’s ever-abiding comforting and healing presence. Regardless of the fabric, the symbolism of the cape will always be one that is appropriate and timely to bring the presence of God’s love into a horrific dilation of time, commonly known as a crisis.

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<sup>17</sup> William Lotz, ed., *The Federation of Fire Chaplains: Fire Chaplain Institute Training Manual* (Fort Worth, Texas: privately printed, 2005), 13.

## HISTORY OF THE MODERN FIRE CHAPLAINS MOVEMENT TODAY TO ORIGINS

On October 1, 1959, Ed Stauffer joined the Fort Worth Fire Department. After many years of fighting fires and saving lives, Ed Stauffer answered God's call to ministry. Throughout his tenure in the fire service, he recognized the internal and external stressors that many firefighters and their families encountered in their daily struggles. Many firefighters confided in Ed about personal matters, and his presence was always requested at disaster scenes.

In 1972, fire administrators recognized Ed's selfless work and appointed him chaplain of the Fort Worth Fire Department. In fact, the Fort Worth Fire Department was the first fire department in the United States to have a paid chaplain's position. Chaplain Stauffer's vision for an organization that supports this unique ministry became a reality in 1978, when local chaplains started the Fellowship of Fire Chaplains. Before long, word spread throughout the United States and the "Fellowship" grew, and in 1991, adopted a constitution that changed its name to the Federation of Fire Chaplains.

The Federation of Fire Chaplains was incorporated as a nonprofit professional organization by the "Articles of Incorporation" dated June 15, 1992. The article states:

The purpose of the organization is to bring together individuals and groups who are interested in providing effective chaplaincy for fire service organizations. To fulfill this purpose the Federation and its membership exchange and share ideas and concerns which influence the quality of life of all members of the fire service and their families. These shared ideas and concerns should encourage and assist each one to develop the most noble of all human characteristics, service to others, and to God,

our Supreme Chief.<sup>18</sup>

The members of the Federation of Fire Chaplains strive to develop a strong sense of community and connectedness to God and the fire service. According to Father Tom Engbers:

By providing an effective fire chaplain service . . . our work will achieve the goal of serving God and humanity. By the nature of our work, firefighters need the help provided by a thoughtful, caring, and effective fire chaplains program. This with God's help, is our purpose and one, which we will strive to build.<sup>19</sup>

The Federation of Fire Chaplains has adopted the international firefighting symbol known as the Maltese Cross as the background for their official badges. Historically, the Maltese Cross has been a badge of courage and protection worn by firefighters and has a story of its own.

The story of the Knights of Saint John has been shared throughout history by firefighters and now by chaplains. The story describes a courageous band of Crusaders from the small island of Malta known as the Knights of Saint John. They were fighting the Saracens in the Crusades for possession of the Holy Land. As the Crusaders approached the walls of the city, glass bombs containing a liquid substance known as naphtha struck their bodies. When the Knights of Saint John became saturated with the flammable liquid, the Saracens hurled flaming arrows and torches. Their protective gear instantly caught fire, and hundreds of Knights were burned alive. Regardless of the risk many ran to save their comrades from the fiery deaths of this newfound weapon of destruction.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

These brave Knights of Saint John became the first known firefighters. Fellow Crusaders recognized their heroic efforts, and awarded each one a cross, similar to the one firefighters wear today. The Knights of Saint John lived on their small Mediterranean Island of Malta for over four hundred years; consequently, the cross, that badge of honor and protection, became known as the Maltese Cross.

The Maltese Cross symbolizes that those who wear it are willing to lay their lives down to protect their fellow comrades and those they are called to serve. Fire Chaplains are also privileged to wear this symbol and honored to serve the firefighters in their communities; hence the adoption of the phrase “To serve those who serve!”



## DUTIES OF THE FIRE CHAPLAIN

Serving God and God’s children is the basis for fire chaplaincy. When called to emergency scenes, it is the chaplain’s duty and honor to bring a strong spiritual presence into a chaotic landscape. Rescue workers’ views are often clouded with helplessness and defeat. Despite their best efforts, firefighters cannot always save lives and property. Following traumatic events, firefighters and victims often ask “Why didn’t God save them?” or “Where was God?” Although, the chaplain does not have to defend God or verbalize a stock religious phrase, it is his or her responsibility to be spiritually, emotionally, and physically present to those in need. To meet the multitude of needs, and to provide the best care, chaplains should constantly strive to sharpen their pastoral care skills.

Clebsch and Jaekle claim: “Pastoral Care is understood historically to embrace the helping acts performed by representative Christians as they facilitate the healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling of troubled individuals, people whose difficulties occur within the context of ultimate meanings and concerns.”<sup>21</sup> The four functions of pastoral care are:

Healing is the pastoral function that “aims to overcome some impairment by restoring a person to wholeness and by leading him in advance beyond his previous condition.” Sustaining is the function that helps individuals endure and rise above situations in which a restoration to their previous condition is unlikely. The guiding function consists of “assisting perplexed persons to make confident choices . . . when such choices are viewed as affecting the present and future state of the soul.” The fourth function, reconciling, seeks to reestablish broken relationships between

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<sup>21</sup> Clebsch, William A. and Charles R. Jaekle, *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1964), 4; quoted in Howard W. Stone, *Theological Context for Pastoral Caregiving: Word in Deed* (Binghamton, NY: The Haworth Press, Inc., 1996), 9.

people and between individuals and God.<sup>22</sup>

In times of crisis, the chaplain is called upon to provide a variety of services that show someone cares.<sup>23</sup> Pastoral care is that act of showing unconditional love and offering a lifeline of hope when one is drowning in the raging rivers of despair. At times like these, pastoral caregivers console and offer prayers of healing. They sustain the sick and downtrodden by visiting them in their homes and hospitals.

Individuals have a difficult time making the simplest of decisions during a crisis. As pastoral caregivers, chaplains offer guidance by listening to concerns and encouraging survivors to make wise decisions. Chaplains come face-to-face with crisis victims displaying heightened levels of adrenalin and anger, but their calm pastoral presence, will hopefully, defuse the situation and later facilitate reconciliation.

Since the inception of professional fire departments, most emergency agencies have had someone to fulfill the role of chaplain. Although it was a volunteer, unofficial position, many local clergypersons were appointed “chaplain” to handle emergencies that required the notification of family members after line-of-duty-injuries and deaths. Chaplains fulfilled a ceremonial role by giving invocations at fire department and civic functions, and also conducting weddings and funerals.

The definition and duties of the chaplain in the modern fire service are far-reaching and ever-changing. Many firefighters voice the difficulties and frustrations they have connecting with

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 9, 10.

<sup>23</sup> Throughout the years, Ed Stauffer, Tom Engbers, Steve Kay, Bill Lotz, Cameron Brown, and many others have discussed the roles and responsibilities of the office of fire chaplaincy. Today we have compiled information and written a document entitled *Serving Those Who Serve: Beginning a Fire Department Chaplaincy Program* (Fort Worth, Texas: privately printed, 2000). Information from this document is used as a reference for the duties and responsibilities of a fire chaplain included in this project and may be found in Appendix A.

organized religion. This is true for many reasons that include: (1) Their rotating shift schedules make attendance at regular worship services sporadic even for the most dedicated; and (2) Firefighters are continually exposed to death and destruction and believe that fellow church members will not understand.

The fire department chaplain may be the only link a firefighter has with clergy or organized religion. However, many say they are “people of faith” but not “practicing people of faith.” When chaplains respond to help firefighters in crisis, they promote resilience by helping them to understand the ways in which God calls us to be in community with God and each other.

An important duty of the chaplain is to understand the personal and religious needs of the firefighters and their families. Fire chaplains might ask an individual in crisis: “Do you have a minister, priest, rabbi, or other clergyperson that I may call for you?” The chaplain can then connect firefighters to their ministers and help their faith communities understand the functions and resources available through the fire department.

The fire chaplain provides spiritual and emotional comfort to victims, their families, and bystanders at fire incidents. The chaplain’s priority may be comforting the bereaved and providing a positive direction to their family. Sometimes chaplains transport families to local hospitals, morgues, or shelters. They also explain the types of available community assistance, such as the Red Cross, Salvation Army, Federal Emergency Management Administration, and local benevolent organizations. Successful chaplaincy interventions occur when the chaplain keeps distraught citizens from interfering with emergency care.

Dealing with firefighters and their families when injury or death occurs is a primary responsibility of the office of chaplaincy. When a firefighter is injured, the chaplain usually responds to the hospital and quickly determines the extent of the injury by talking with the

conscious firefighter, or if unconscious, the medical staff. The chaplain then notifies the family in a manner that does not cause undue panic. At the time of initial call or contact, the chaplain determines whether the family needs transportation to the hospital.

At fire incidents, if not involved in actual firefighting or medical treatment, the chaplain may be alert to the needs of the rescue workers. Firefighters often work to the point of exhaustion. Chaplains may witness overexertion and then make command officers aware of potentially dangerous situations that need immediate attention. At these scenes, chaplains are advocates for firefighters' health and safety.

Fire chaplains are also liaisons between firefighters and local hospital staff. Chaplains should frequently visit local hospitals and medical clinics to build rapport with medical personnel. These visits help the medical and pastoral care personnel have confidence in the work of the fire chaplain.

When a firefighter is injured or dies, the chaplain makes the family aware of available insurance and compensatory benefits. Chaplains should be knowledgeable about city, state, and federal line of duty injury and death benefits. Many fire departments have their own benevolent associations, blood banks, auxiliaries, and other support programs that aid the sick, injured, and bereaved.

Families call chaplains to help them make funeral arrangements for active duty and retired firefighters. Chaplains may even officiate at the service or assist the family clergy person. Oftentimes, fire department personnel need assistance to organize the funeral service. Details to be considered are: (1) Calling the honor guard and bagpiper; (2) Coordinating the procurement of fire department apparatus for the funeral procession; (3) Organizing fire department personnel to make the "wall of honor" at the funeral home, church, and cemetery; and (4) Coordinating the

food and facility for the family gathering after the funeral or interment. In addition to building relationships with medical personnel, chaplains should also have a good working relationship with local funeral directors. Chaplains may help the directors understand the rituals and traditions involved in a fire department funeral.

The daily stressors of shift work, tragic incidents, and familial issues have greatly contributed to the need for competent pastoral care and counseling. However, it is not recommended that fire chaplains attempt counseling in all areas, especially when they lack the skills or credentials. Nonetheless, there is a great need for firefighters and their families to verbalize their concerns to someone they trust. Chaplains may provide confidential pastoral discussions to firefighters and their family members for problem issues including, but not limited to, marital and family relationships, parenting skills, finances, substance abuse, crisis of faith, critical incident stress, care of aging parents, and a host of other problem areas.

At the request of an individual, fire chaplains may visit fire stations and firefighter's homes. The visits encourage a great deal of friendship. The chaplain may provide emotional and spiritual support to the sick, distraught, and bereaved. There are also joyous occasions that demand a chaplain's presence. These events include the birth of a new baby, adoption of a child, birthday or anniversary celebrations, and blessings bestowed upon a new home. The fire chaplain may also be called upon to facilitate pre-marital counseling before performing wedding ceremonies for fire department members.

During new recruit classes, chaplains facilitate pastoral care classes and may teach subjects such as ethics, chaplaincy program resources and services, critical incident stress management, family life cycle issues, cultural diversity, and religion in the workplace. Fire chaplains also give invocations and benedictions at graduations, city council meetings, and other civic gatherings.

Chaplains give dedicatory prayers at new fire stations, the delivery of a new piece of fire apparatus, and memorials for emergency workers.

Chaplaincy is deeply rooted in history and tradition. As we journeyed through the centuries, we acknowledged Saint Martin's act of pastoral care and the sacred journey of the first firefighters, known as the Knights of Saint John. Today, this journey continues as chaplains and firefighters answer God's call to protect those they are called to serve.

While it is true that the roles and responsibilities of today's fire department chaplains differ from those of earlier years, one thing is certain, those called by God are privileged to bring comfort and warmth to those in need. Fire chaplains perform the aforementioned functions of pastoral care: healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling. They heal or "restore a person to wholeness" and "guide" persons by responding when called, listening to stories of joy and despair, and empowering individuals to make the right moral and ethical decisions. Chaplains sustain the injured, sick, and bereaved by praying for them and visiting them in their homes and hospitals. Fire chaplains facilitate the reconciliation process or the "mending of relationships" by listening, counseling with, and teaching firefighters conflict resolution skills with an emphasis on forgiveness.

The office of fire chaplaincy is one of the most vital positions in the fire service. Most fire departments have written documents that define the roles and responsibilities of its members. Since members of the fire service and community residents come from various faith-based backgrounds, fire chaplains should be prepared to serve all families regardless of their religious background and national origin. Ideally, fire departments should employ a group of chaplains that embodies every faith group represented in their community: A rabbi for the Jews; an imam for the Muslims; a priest for the Catholics; a monk for the Buddhists; and a variety of protestant

ministers. However, due to budget constraints and other factors, this ideal is not always practical.

In summary, chaplains provide spiritual care at joyous occasions and times of crisis. Overall, all events give chaplains opportunities to build pastoral relationships. Regardless of their faith traditions, most individuals have personal relationships with God, their families, and their communities.

The issue of family from a faith-based perspective with an emphasis on an individual's connectedness and personal relationship to God, family, and community will be explored in chapter three. Abraham and Sarah, biblical heroes of faith, faced famine, childlessness, and abandoned their native land; yet, their commitment to God and community gave them strength to endure the harsh conditions.

## CHAPTER 3

### A BIBLICAL MODEL FOR RESILIENCY

That One Who brings being itself into being, that One for Whom all time, all space, is ever-present, that One Who is the Breath of Life, Who breathes compassion, YHWH/Allah/God, called Abram to go forward with his family, going outward for the sake of going inward, to leave the broken place of shattered truth and seek a wholeness that God would let him see.<sup>24</sup>

We begin this chapter with an excerpt from “The Journey Told Anew.” “One,” in this poetic narrative demonstrates that one God transcends all time and space. One is present to comfort, rescue, and sustain broken people when their lives are shattered. It does not matter whether our faith community is Christian, Jewish, or Muslim; all serve one Deity.

Three world religions, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam have honored Abraham as their ancient patriarch and a model of faith in one God.<sup>25</sup> In Christianity, Abraham is the spiritually faithful man who obediently listens to God’s commands. In Judaism, through Abraham and Sarah’s son Isaac, and grandson Jacob, the twelve tribes of Israel are interconnected. In the

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<sup>24</sup> Poetic narrative written by Rabbi Arthur Waskow and Murshid Saadi Shakur Chishti strives to “unify the Jewish/Christian and Muslim narratives of the Abrahamic saga without negating the uniqueness of either version of the family story;” quoted in Joan Chittister, Murshid Saadi Shakur Chishti, and Rabbi Arthur Waskow, *The Tent of Abraham: Stories of Hope and Peace for Jews, Christians, and Muslims* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 191-192.

<sup>25</sup> Abraham first appears as “Abram” while Sarah first appears as “Sarai,” but their names are not changed until (Genesis 17:5 and Genesis 17:15). For the purpose of this paper, I will refer to their commonly known names of Abraham and Sarah.



Koran, Muslims identify Abraham and Ishmael as the builders of the sacred site at Mecca. Abraham is seen as a faithful man in all three religions.<sup>26</sup>

During this historical period, polytheism was the norm, but God wanted to be in relationship with Abraham. God called Abraham to believe and trust one God, therefore, Abraham and his descendents choose to become monotheists. God makes three major promises: (1) God's guarantee to always be in relationship with Abraham is central to the covenant; (2) God will give Abraham gifts of land and offspring; and (3) God's blessing upon Abraham will flow out to all families on earth (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-6; 17:1-8).<sup>27</sup>

The author of Genesis reveals a Deity that fulfills a covenant to be in relationship with Abraham and his family. Max Stackhouse writes:

What ever its historical or primitive cultic origins, the biblical prophets, priests and kings recognized in covenant a basic feature of human life, something central to the formation and preservation of community, personal identity and, indeed, the moral life of humanity. Not only did they apply the term to the relationship of God to chosen persons, who were called to specific vocations in the world, and to Israel as a chosen people, but they also saw in the very fabric of this association an ordered liberty that interwove righteousness and power, law and promise, and thus a form of structured accountability that allowed all people to deal justly with one another and to manage scarce resources and competing loyalties with the greatest possible harmony. Those called into covenant were to be a light to all.<sup>28</sup> As

Stackhouse points out, covenant is “central to the formation and preservation of community and

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<sup>26</sup> Although the bulk of this project is intended for chaplains of all faith traditions, the perspective and tradition of the author is Christian.

<sup>27</sup> The intent of this chapter is not to provide an exegetical sketch of the Book of Genesis or a detailed orientation of this historical family.

<sup>28</sup> Max Stackhouse, *Covenant and Commitment*, 142.

personal identity.”<sup>29</sup> God’s ever-abiding relationship with Abraham is foundational to the establishment of a community of faith. Throughout this chapter, we will look through a lens of reality and adversity at this family, to identify familial and individual strengths, which promote resilience. Clouds of confusion, revealing a biblical character’s sinful nature, often overshadow the light of truth.

The characteristics of “family” are important to address when one explores resilience in Abraham’s family. Most definitions of “family” are social constructions. Therefore, the word may have a variety of meanings depending upon the context in which it is used. Most agree that family may be defined as a “special relationship between its members” but it is also a social institution:

As a social institution the family regulates sexual intercourse, assigns responsibility for children, conserves lines of descent, and orders wealth and inheritance. It assigns roles for the division of labor for everyday living, supports the roles of its members in the external economy, participates with other institutions in the socialization of the coming generation, and plays a role in the physical and psychological welfare of its members. Christian theology and ethics reflect on how to exercise these functions in ways appropriate to Christian conviction and experience.<sup>30</sup>

Healthy interpersonal relationships require an equal division of labor, supportive family system, and proficiency in communicating an individual’s needs and responsibilities.

Communication and connectedness empower family members to build trust in each other.

Ideally, family members provide comfort and support to each other during joyous occasions and critical events. Strong families are emotionally and spiritually connected to God and each other,

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> James F. Childress and John MacQuarrie, eds., *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 224.

especially in those relationships that share a mutual trust and respect. The ancient narrative about Abraham and his descendants reveals a family that struggles with the day-to-day stressors of that period. Abraham's obedience to God remains steadfast regardless of his interpersonal struggles. Despite Abraham's trials and self-induced fallacies, God is the encouraging constant in his life, and the One, who shows mercy and grace, while fulfilling the covenant.

To fulfill their covenant with God, Abraham and Sarah leave their homeland and their family for a nomadic lifestyle. They have an insatiable hunger for survival and yearning for a child. Although, God's promises are not immediately fulfilled, God continuously guides and watches over their journey. Perhaps the Psalmist reflected on Abraham and Sarah's historical plight while writing, "The Lord says, 'I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you'" (Psalm 32:8, NRSV).

On the one hand, Abraham and Sarah are obedient and faithful people. On the other, when faced with life and death issues, they become fearful and weak in their faith. First, in an attempt to escape death, Abraham deceives the King of Egypt when he presents Sarah as his sister. Abraham abandons Sarah, consequently, she becomes part of Pharaoh's harem. Sarah must feel emotionally and physically abandoned by her husband when he transfers her to another man's household. Tammi Schneider writes:

Sarah is described with five main characteristics in the Hebrew Bible: no family, married, barren, beautiful, and old. The impact of Abraham's apparent attempt to rid himself of Sarah in Egypt is magnified by what the text revealed earlier about Sarah. Sarah had no one but Abraham, and Abraham uses Sarah's beauty to rid himself of her. The Deity overturns Sarah's first descriptor, "barren" when she receives her final description, "old." Once

Sarah's first description is overturned and she is no longer barren, she is also no longer alone.<sup>31</sup>

Schneider implies that Sarah suffers loneliness because she is neither physically nor emotionally connected to her husband or extended family. The author of Genesis does not reveal Sarah's family of origin. With no family, her identity is based upon her spousal relationship with Abraham. Despite Abraham's intentional dishonesty, God maintains a relationship with this prospective mother and father.

Later in the story, Abraham again proclaims that Sarah is his sister. The text implicates both Abraham and Sarah as guilty partners in this game of deception. However, as earlier stated, the root motivation for lying, appears to be Abraham's fear of death. This second account of duplicity unfolds when Abraham hands Sarah over to Abimelech, the King of Gerar (Genesis 20:2). Shortly afterwards, Sarah's marital status is revealed to King Abimelech in a dream.

In the first account, plagues struck Egypt shortly after Abraham hands Sarah over to Pharaoh. In the second story of deceit, women in Abimelech's kingdom are neither conceiving nor giving birth. As earlier mentioned, when family is viewed as a social institution, the births of children are vital to "preserve the lines of descent and appropriating wealth and inheritance."<sup>32</sup>

Similar to his profit gain in the first account, Abraham again profits from his deceitfulness (Genesis 20:14). Abimelech gives Abraham a "thousand pieces of silver" to protect Sarah's honor (Genesis 20:16). In return, Abraham prays for the women of Gerar to soon bear children. Despite his wealth, Abraham cannot purchase the conception of a child for Sarah.

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<sup>31</sup> Tammi J. Schneider, *Mothers of Promise: Women in the Book of Genesis* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008), 25.

<sup>32</sup> Childress and MacQuarrie, *Westminster Dictionary*, 224.

The story continues, Sarah is either unaware of God's promises to Abraham or her impatience and desperation influence her decision to force her maidservant Hagar into a relationship with Abraham. Her intense desire to produce a new life in the form of a child parallels Abraham's desperation to avoid death. Both Sarah and Abraham will go to extreme measures to give birth as well as evade loss. Analogous to Abraham's sacrificial gift of Sarah to Pharaoh and Abimelech, Sarah's exploits Hagar when she hands her servant over to Abraham.

Rather than trusting and patiently waiting for God to fulfill the promise of a child, Sarah blames God for her barrenness. She then asserts control and arranges for Abraham to impregnate Hagar. Shortly after Hagar gets pregnant, Sarah's pride is injured, and her identity threatened. Sarah probably believes that her status as Abraham's "wife" and her identity as a "mother" are compromised because she has not conceived nor given birth.

The questions arise, "Is Sarah's impulsiveness a response to her lack of faith and understanding, or does Abraham fail to communicate God's promises to her?" Author Tammi Schneider writes:

Sarah does not act again until 18:10, where she listens at the tent to the word of the Deity's messengers (18:10). When changing Sarai's name to Sarah (17:15), the Deity decrees that Sarah will have a child (17:16), and it is Sarah's child who will inherit the Deity's covenant (17:19). The Deity will bless Ishmael and he will be fertile, and the Deity will make him a great nation (17:20); but the Deity stresses that the covenant will be maintained with Isaac (17:21). Prior to Sarah's listening at the tent door, the Deity had promised Abraham that Sarah would have a child that would inherit the covenant with the Deity. Her reaction indicates that Abraham has neglected to inform her of this promise. What Abraham does not share with Sarah is likely the point of the messenger's visit.

Gunn and Fewell argue that the Deity must send a messenger because Abraham never agrees to the Deity's plan for Sarah to become the mother of the heir of the covenant.<sup>33</sup>

The aforementioned events suggest human competition, ineffective communication, and lack of understanding and compassion. In fact, it appears that God is the only one listening and intervening. Joan Chittister writes:

The story of Abraham is even more about God's hope, God's patience, and God's ways with a weak, stumbling, recalcitrant people who under no circumstances will ever be able to meet and match even their own best impulses, let alone the will of God Most High or them.<sup>34</sup>

Abraham and Sarah are far from perfect. Although, egocentrism and feelings of inadequacy dominate this human narrative, God protects the promised covenant of being in relationship with them. In fact, God rescues them repeatedly. A pattern develops: (1) Sarah gets angry and blames God for her barrenness; yet, God gives her a son; (2) Abraham fails to communicate God's promises that Sarah will bear a son; still, God responds with messengers to communicate this important detail;<sup>35</sup> and (3) Sarah rejects Hagar and Ishmael for fear that Isaac will lose his inheritance; but God provides for the servant and her son.

Thus far, attention has focused on Abraham and Sarah's weaknesses and their lapses in judgment. Attention will now shift to actions that demonstrate strength and resilience. Abraham often used poor judgment but those actions are balanced with actions by him that displayed great

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<sup>33</sup> Schneider, *Mothers*, 30, 31.

<sup>34</sup> Chittister, Chishti, and Waskow, *Tent of Abraham*, 120.

<sup>35</sup> Schneider states that "Though the messengers never see Sarah, they impart information Abraham already has and that Sarah needs to know: they will have a child. Since they report this intentionally within Sarah's hearing, she appears to be the primary target of this information" quoted in Chittister, Chishti, and Waskow, *Tent of Abraham*, 120.

conviction. Some examples of Abraham's great faith in God are: (1) Abraham's willingness to leave the security of his country, his people, and his father's household; (2) Abraham gave Lot the opportunity to choose the most fertile land, because Abraham trusts God to provide for his household; (3) Abraham ensures all males in his household are circumcised as a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham's family; (4) Abraham follows God's instructions and takes Isaac to Mount Moriah to sacrifice him as a burnt offering.

Although, we know only generalities about the interpersonal relationships between Abraham, Sarah, and others in their community there must have been veins of strength and resilience that flowed through their lives. Stackhouse believes "We are created for community with the divine Other and with each other."<sup>36</sup> God is indeed the powerful force that promotes resilience in this ancient society.

Earlier, we looked disapprovingly at the two events where Sarah was presented as Abraham's sister. Now the time has come to extract the positive affirmations from these negative situations: (1) There is a great famine in the land of Canaan; God sends Abraham and Sarah to Egypt for provisions; (2) Abraham protects himself by fabricating his family tree: He lies; (3) Sarah is barren: Pharaoh does not impregnate her; (4) The plagues that strike Egypt influence Pharaoh to banish Abraham and Sarah from his kingdom: Abraham receives many gifts because Sarah is so beautiful.

God continuously provides supplies for Abraham's family. In fact, Sarah and her husband leave Egypt wealthy because Pharaoh sends them away with more than substantial provisions and servants. The livestock provides milk, curds, and meat. For shelter, they use animal skins and hair to make tents and weave wool into blankets and clothing.

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<sup>36</sup> Stackhouse, *Covenant and Commitment*, 159.

The servants are an integral part of Abraham and Sarah's community of faith. Their servant Hagar becomes a vital part of their nuclear family. However, Sarah soon becomes fearful and reacts negatively to Hagar's pregnancy. Sarah fears Hagar's motherhood will elevate her status from servant to equal. Sarah is mean-spirited and her reproach forces Hagar to run into the wilderness, God protects her journey. Rabbi Waskow writes, "There at the wellspring she [Hagar] became the first person in the Bible to hear a *malach* of YHWH, God's messenger or angel speak to her."<sup>37</sup> God's message influences Hagar's safe return to Abraham and Sarah's community.

Later, Sarah becomes jealous of Ishmael and Isaac's relationship and fears Ishmael will become the chosen heir. Sarah convinces Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away. Abraham gives them only one skin of water. When they become thirsty and tired, Ishmael's weakened state leads Hagar to think that he is dying. God hears Hagar's cries. She opens her eyes to see the water coming from the well she had earlier named the "Well of the Living One Who sees me."<sup>38</sup> Abraham fails to supply adequate provisions, but God is there to rescue Abraham's servant and son. Hagar and Ishmael, like Abraham and Sarah, persevere because God continuously watches over them.

An optimistic outlook on life and one's ability to laugh and share joy are positive indicators of resilience. Sarah never seems to share much joy with Abraham, Hagar, or Ishmael. However, when the messengers announce Sarah's forthcoming pregnancy and birth; she laughs! Perhaps, she is shocked and thinks "At our age how is conception going to happen?" or she is overjoyed

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<sup>37</sup> Chittister, Chishti, and Waskow, *Tent of Abraham*, 7.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*,12.



with God's promise that the birth of her child will eventually come true. When Sarah's son is born, she names him Isaac, which means "laughing one."

Isaac must have brought great joy and much laughter into Abraham and Sarah's family. However, laughter quickly turns to sadness when God tells Abraham to take Isaac to Mount Moriah. Abraham obediently offers to sacrifice his son. Abraham's faith is tested, but he still trusts God. God rewards Abraham's trust and faithfulness by providing the ram that spares Isaac's life.

Abraham's family is tested repeatedly. Abraham and Sarah experience fear, brokenness, confusion, anger, and alienation from God, their family, and each other. Yet, their character is strengthened because these tests deepen their commitment to God. Human beings are inherently dependent on God; and Abraham's strong character is a positive attribute that is transferred to Isaac and generations to come.

Abraham and Sarah must have been very proud of him. The text tells us that like Abraham, God blessed Isaac. Isaac, like his father, is a wealthy man who owns livestock and servants. Water, a life-giving gift and precious sign of God's provision since the beginning of creation, has always been vital for survival. Isaac works hard to reopen the wells that the Philistines previously filled. As soon as he reopens the wells, people come and claim them. Yet, Isaac does not get angry nor retaliate. In fact, he digs more wells and becomes well known for applying peaceful solutions to conflicts.

Scripture tells us, when Sarah dies, Isaac's wife Rebekah "comforts" him. Later, an act of reconciliation occurs when Isaac and Ishmael come together to grieve their father's death. Abraham's descendants are resilient people because God protects and provides for them.

Regardless of human fallacies, God keeps God's promises to lead, guide, and protect them on their journeys.

Like our ancestors, we have a dire need for a deep-seated family commitment that empowers us to stay emotionally connected to God, family, and community. Theologically, human beings have a common belief that connectedness begins with God, and extends out to others. These values are foundational to weathering the storms of life like those represented in this ancient story. For this purpose, connectedness to a supreme power invokes a higher refinement of an individual's bond of communal ties during stressful events.

Abraham and Sarah set the stage for Walsh's description of connectedness and resilience. Although they faced famine, childlessness, and abandoned their native land for the vicissitudes of nomadic life, their eventual commitment and connectedness to God give them strength to endure their hardships. Their ability to rebound from many trials is a testimony that God's promise to be in intentional relationship with human beings is fulfilled. The story of Abraham and Sarah's journey reinforces the truth that God's ever-abiding presence transcends all time and space.

Gabriel said, "Don't be afraid. The One never neglects the people of the One." Look for help outside, but expect it always under your own feet springing from the grace of Sacred Unity.<sup>39</sup>

Abraham's family is strengthened by their connectedness to God and each other. In chapter four, we will look at the theoretical issues of Froma Walsh's strength-based approach to help individuals and their families rebound after critical events.

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<sup>39</sup> Chittister, Shakur, and Waskow, *Tent of Abraham*, 194. The complete poetic narrative *The Journey Told Anew* may be found in its entirety on pages 191-196.

## CHAPTER 4

### THEORETICAL GROUNDING: FROMA WALSH'S FOUNDATIONS OF A FAMILY RESILIENCY APPROACH

Despite negative life events, Abraham and his descendents display resilience because they stay connected to God and their communities. Chapter four begins with the theoretical grounding and the identification of key interactional processes that empower individuals and families to rebound from disruptive life challenges. Froma Walsh writes:

Resilience can be defined as the capacity to rebound from adversity strengthened and more resourceful. It is an active process of endurance, self-righting, and growth in response to crisis and challenge. The qualities of resilience enable people to heal from painful wounds, take charge of their lives, and go on to live fully and love well. A resilience lens shifts perspective from viewing distressed families as damaged to seeing them as challenged, affirming their potential for repair and growth. This approach is based on the conviction that both individual and family strength can be forged through collaborative efforts to deal with sudden crisis or prolonged adversity.<sup>40</sup>

Human beings have a tendency to focus on the negative aspects of any given situation. However, a resilience-based approach focuses on personal strengths rather than weaknesses. Adversities and crises are painful facts of life. Negative life events range from divorce to the sudden death of a significant other. Any attempt to define these challenges may inadvertently minimize an individual's traumatic experience, because, a "crisis is real to the person experiencing it."

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<sup>40</sup> Froma Walsh, *Family Resilience*, 3, 4.

The broadcast goes over the fire department radio “Mayday, Mayday, two firefighters have fallen through the roof!” Firefighters from four communities fight a raging church fire. Church sanctuary fires may quickly become a firefighter’s worst nightmare. Structural collapse is common in church fires due to unsupported roofs over large public assembly areas. The fire dispatcher’s voice crackles as he describes the horror of this tragic incident to the chaplain.

The chaplain responds to the scene and soon confirms that three firefighters are missing and presumed dead. Firefighters point to one of the missing firefighter’s wife and his mother. The chaplain turns to look at the women and quickly notices one is pregnant. The chaplain notifies the young woman that her husband is missing. She screams so loudly, that even today, most emergency workers can recall her heart-wrenching cry for help. Her screams leave an indelible imprint on the minds of many. Several days after burying her husband, she gives birth to their son. One of the other firefighter’s wives is also nine months pregnant. She gives birth to her third child several weeks after her husband’s funeral.

This incident affected emergency workers, their families, and the community as a whole. The question arises, “How do people suffer such great losses, yet manage to live healthy, productive lives?” In chapter three, we looked at the story of Abraham and Sarah to see that their strength existed because God had a strong desire to be in relationship with them. Two of the three deceased firefighters and their families had a strong faith in God and actively participated in their faith communities. Research on spirituality and resilience shows:

Spirituality may not so much serve as a protector against developing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or poor health, but may emerge as a way of coping in those with high distress or poor health (Calhoun, Cann, Tedeschi, &McMillan, 2000; King et al., 1999; Lau & Grossman, 1997; Park et al., 1996; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996; Waysmann et al., 2001). The nature of the relationship between religious faith and negative life events can be

complex: for some individuals, religious faith may enhance the ability to cope with negative life events; while for others, negative life events may result in greater religious faith. It is also possible that negative life events which cause a decrease in well-being (i.e., increased distress) may result in a strengthening of spiritual beliefs, which in turn may help to restore well-being and reduce distress to pre-event levels (Baumeister, 1991).<sup>41</sup>

Before the church fire, two firefighters, their wives, and their extended family members were active in both their faith and fire department communities. After the fire their faith communities and fire department families collaborated to meet the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs of these bereaved families. Research shows that religious participation is a vital coping resource:

Religion can foster resilience during bereavement both by providing a stable, shared belief system and by providing affiliation and social support from the religious community . . . . Recent factor analytic studies of religious involvement have identified two unique dimensions, personal devotion (a personal relationship with the divine) and personal conservatism (a personal commitment to teaching and living according to a creed), that appear to exert a salubrious influence among at-risk individuals.<sup>42</sup>

The chaplain is the link to the spiritual and religious community for the non-believing and the non-practicing believer without a faith community. Chaplains are often the spiritual leaders in a secular environment. In times of loss and crises, they represent God's comforting and healing presence to individuals and families who may feel helpless and hopeless. They are agents of hope, who promote resilience through their interconnectedness with God and those they are called to serve. Chaplains help individuals in crisis come to grip with their negative experiences.

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<sup>41</sup> Kathryn M. Conner, Jonathon R.T. Davidson, and Li-Ching Lee, "Spirituality, Resilience, and Anger in Survivors of Violent Trauma: A Community Survey," *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, Vol. 16, No. 5 (October 2003): 491, 492.

<sup>42</sup> George A. Bosanno et al., "Resilience to Loss and Chronic Grief: A Prospective Study from Preloss to 18-Months Postloss," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* Vol. 83, No. 5 (November 2002): 5.

Chaplains help people identify healthy coping strategies that will help them regain normalcy in their lives. Walsh believes that:

In many instances, family members may be helped to come to terms with a tragedy beyond their comprehension and control by drawing on spiritual resources to make meaning and find comfort and solace through their faith. Exploring a person's spiritual beliefs and practices should become part of all efforts to help families overcome adversity.<sup>43</sup>

Firefighters and their families have a difficult time comprehending life of duty deaths, especially, since some firefighters think they are invincible. However, firefighters and their families may feel vulnerable when an emergency worker is injured or killed. After these catastrophic events, many firefighters seek counsel from their chaplains. My experience shows me, that when faced with relationship problems and life-changing crises, those with a faith background and communal ties, seek their minister or chaplain's assistance earlier than those with more secular ideas do.<sup>44</sup> Walsh supports this notion, stating, "Studies have found that highly resilient people do reach out for help when needed, turning to kin, social, and religious support systems, as well as to professionals."<sup>45</sup>

In times of crises, firefighters most often turn to their chaplains, not mental health professionals, for help. They turn to chaplains because there is a deep level of trust that the fire chaplain as a representative of God's presence will respond and do anything within his or her power to comfort, support, and guide members through the crisis. Chaplaincy is a merciful service that grants chaplains sacred opportunities to spiritually and emotionally connect with people.

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<sup>43</sup> Walsh, *Family Resilience*, 141.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 84, 85.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

Froma Walsh prefers the term “connectedness” to describe the “counterbalance of unity, mutual support, and collaboration with the separateness and autonomy of the individual.”<sup>46</sup>

Walsh further describes connectedness as (1) Strength through mutual support, collaboration, and commitment; (2) Respect for individual needs, differences, and boundaries; (3) Strong leadership that occurs through nurturing, protecting, and guiding children and vulnerable family members; and (4) Seeking reconnection and reconciliation of troubled relationships.<sup>47</sup>

Connectedness and communal ties are two key interactional processes that empower firefighters and their families to withstand and rebound from life’s challenges. Firefighters’ deep sense of community and connectedness to peers, begins at the fire academy, and may continue throughout their firefighting careers. After graduation, firefighters work a 24-hour shift rotation equal to 240 hours each month. The fire station becomes a “home away from home” because firefighters work, eat, and sleep at their stations. Because of their extended time together co-workers may be viewed as a pseudo-family.

According to Walsh, the idea of home in the sense that it is community goes beyond our immediate family. By building relationships at the fire station, firefighters connect as a community to help each other during their darkest hours. There is a family-like atmosphere at the fire station where firefighters exchange intimate information about their nuclear and extended family members. When firefighters have interpersonal conflicts with their loved ones, their co-workers, can be their best or their worst allies. Co-workers indeed become part of the family system.

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 80.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 80, 85.

Froma Walsh's "strength-oriented approach" is grounded in Murray Bowen's systems theory. Roberta M. Gilbert characterizes Bowen's family systems theory this way:

A superior life course, according to this theory, is based on thinking rather than feelings, which come and go. The human's best thinking, according to this theory, is based on fact, not feeling, though feelings are given a great deal of attention. The theory is based on the family as the emotional unit, not the individual, though the individual is most important to the theory. Further, it is based on observation rather than on what people think, feel, or say about themselves and others.<sup>48</sup>

Within Bowen's family systems theory, a crew or group of firefighters can be seen as an "emotional unit." This family system or emotional unit, which lives and works together share many common experiences, both good and bad. This system can be supportive and empower its members to overcome the residual emotional turmoil associated with traumatic events. Jeff Mitchell designed a debriefing group model for emergency workers to use after a critical incident. The "Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Model" is designed to help emergency workers talk about their roles, thoughts, and reactions to a particular critical event. This reflective opportunity helps them to find meaning in the work they do.

Chaplains promote resilience by giving people opportunities to vent their thoughts. On-scene interventions, such as at the church roof collapse, give chaplains opportunities to observe firefighters in their work environment. Emergency workers may physically and emotionally withdraw when mental health workers ask, "How do you feel?" At debriefings, chaplains and other caregivers might ask fact and thought questions. For example, "What did you do at the scene?" and "What were your first thoughts when you heard that the firefighters were missing". Resilience-focused interventions, such as "Critical Incident Stress Management" and "Fire Families Support Programs" are proactive approaches to "shore up vulnerability and buffer

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<sup>48</sup> Roberta M. Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory: A New Way of Thinking about The Individual and The Group* (Falls Church: Leading Systems Press, 2006), 1.



stress.<sup>49</sup> Chaplains provide pastoral care to give firefighters by affirming their work and their strengths; therefore, empowering them to return to normal functioning quicker.

Firefighters and their families look to a higher power when encountering life-changing events. Chaplains represent God's ever-abiding presence. Walsh identifies transcendence and spirituality as key factors in resilience:

Transcendent beliefs provide meaning and purpose beyond ourselves, our families, and our adversities (Beavors & Hampson, 1990). The need to find greater meaning in our lives is most commonly met through spiritual faith and cultural heritage. Transcendent beliefs offer clarity about our lives and solace in distress; they render unexpected events less threatening and enable acceptance of situations that cannot be changed.<sup>50</sup> 'Spirituality' can be defined as 'that which connects one to all there is' (Griffith & Griffith, 1998). Spirituality involves an active investment in internal values that bring a sense of meaning, inner wholeness, and connection with others. Suffering invites us into the spiritual domain (Wright et al., 1996). Religion and spirituality offer comfort and meaning beyond comprehension in the face of adversity. Personal faith supports the belief that we can overcome our challenges.<sup>51</sup>

In an attempt to assess faith-based resources, a chaplain might ask, "How has your personal faith or spirituality been a resource in your life?" The chaplain might also ask, "In the past when faced with challenges how have you managed to cope and overcome hardships?" Chaplains use this line of questioning to invite individuals to tell their personal narratives or sacred stories. Hopefully, their spiritual experiences have been helpful and positive. The fire chaplain may assist a particular family from "cradle to death." The chaplain's awareness of sacred stories may be essential in helping a family identify their strengths.

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<sup>49</sup> Walsh, *Family Resilience*, viii.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 68, 69.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 70, 71.

Chaplains must quickly assess both an individual's strengths and weaknesses. Most chaplains entering this vocation are blessed with the gift of discernment. They may easily assess an individual's physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. On the scene, that might require a quiet presence and praying, or actively getting water, Gatorade, cool towels, or warm blankets. Chaplains listen, assess, and identify vital resources that will facilitate physical, emotional, and spiritual healing. For this purpose a collaborative relationship develops between caregiver and survivor so individual needs are met.

Looking at an individual's weaknesses, not strengths may perpetuate feelings of helplessness. Chaplains empower people to rebound by encouraging them to look at viable options and make wise decisions. When individuals are distressed, making even small decisions gives them a sense of control over traumatic situations.

Insightfulness and optimism are essential attributes for stress-hardy persons. These traits help family members identify the strengths that make them a cohesive unit. "Collaboration among family members is encouraged, enabling them to build new and renewed competence, mutual support, and shared confidence that they can prevail under duress."<sup>52</sup>

An optimistic attitude is a necessary coping mechanism for dealing with adversity. Martin Seligman notes that "learned optimism" makes a person hardier in stressful events. The concept of learned optimism, introduced by Martin Seligman (1990), has relevance for fostering family resilience. His research also found that individuals with "dogged determination, persistence, and competitiveness" are more likely to be optimistic. When faced with a challenge, most firefighters are determined, persistent, and competitive. These qualities contribute to their ability and

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 23.

intestinal fortitude that helps them survive life-threatening situations. Their competitive nature shows at sporting events and promotional exams; yet, these qualities help build community and camaraderie.

An optimistic attitude is a key factor in one's ability to cope with illness, death, and other losses. Helplessness, on the other hand, is an attitude or belief that one cannot overcome traumatic experiences. Walsh writes about Seligman's earlier studies on "learned helplessness:"

People can be conditioned to become helpless and to give up on trying to solve problems, particularly when rewards and punishments are unpredictable or random, regardless of their behavior. When people learn their actions are futile and that nothing they do matters, they no longer initiate action and become passive, dependent, and hopeless. Qualities of permanence, pervasiveness, and personalization contribute to learned helplessness . . . There is evidence that depression and pessimism are mutually reinforcing and can deplete the immune system, impair physical health, and even hasten death . . .<sup>53</sup>

Victimization and "learned helplessness" occur when individuals see themselves as victims not survivors. They focus on the negative aspects of their journey because they are stuck in the turmoil; in fact for many, helplessness turns into hopelessness. Seligman optimistically contends that learned helplessness can be overcome and a life of despair avoided through "psychological immunization." He writes:

Helplessness can be learned and it can be unlearned by experiences of mastery, in which people come to believe their own efforts and actions can work . . . and through a process of 'immunization,' early learning that responsiveness matters can prevent learned helplessness throughout life. To date, findings show that children who learn such skills as disputing their negative thoughts and negotiating with peers show less depression than control children,

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 63.

with effects increasing over time. Such findings point to the importance of strengthening family communication skills.<sup>54</sup>

Similar to the general population, firefighters and their families face a variety of stressors and relationship difficulties. Yet, most emergency workers have more intrinsic strength and better coping skills given the nature of their profession. These individual characteristics include a high level of self-esteem; a desire to be in control attitude; an optimistic outlook; a high level of commitment to helping others; and an ability to adapt to change.<sup>55</sup> When an individual's ability to cope is overtaxed, he or she may look for others to bring control to the chaotic event. Citizens look to emergency workers to bring order out of chaos! Consequently, firefighters may feel the need to be in control of themselves, situations, and other individuals. Walsh believes that control should be expressed through self-control rather than control of others.<sup>56</sup>

Chaplains use empathic questioning and responses to connect with others. Connectedness occurs in this rapport-building stage. A relationship of mutual trust and understanding makes the helping process easier and more productive. Trust between chaplain and firefighter may be developed before the first emergency.

Relationships between chaplain and firefighters and chaplain and families may begin early in a firefighter's career. Pre-incident education opportunities are times when these relationships may be built. These proactive educational opportunities may better prepare the firefighters and

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 63, 64.

<sup>55</sup> Walsh states that "hardy personalities possess three general characteristics: (1) the belief that they can control or influence events in their experience; (2) an ability to feel deeply involved in or committed to activities in their lives; and (3) anticipation of change as an exciting challenge to further development" (Ibid., 9, 10).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 94.

their families to meet future challenges.<sup>57</sup> The “Fire Families Support Program” is a resilience-focused program designed to teach families healthy coping and communication skills so they will be stronger and better able to cope with adversities. As a fire service community firefighters and their families may have a variety of resources not readily available to the public.<sup>58</sup> Walsh affirms, “Meaningful kin and community connections are lifelines in times of distress and community, like the sacred, is an idea that becomes reality because we believe in it.”<sup>59</sup> A strong sense of community is vital to the well being of individuals facing hardship. Regardless of their religious affiliation, firefighters and their families come together during crises to help one another. Much like a faith community, they provide food, emotional, spiritual, and financial support to their peers facing troubling times. The chaplain may coordinate these efforts, but the firefighters and their families gather and deliver food, provide transportation, and childcare.

Chaplains are promoters of resilience and the reader will find in chapter five the strength-based resources, interventions, and programs designed to empower fire department families to rebound from negative events in their lives. The deaths in the line of duty at the aforementioned church fire opened the eyes of chaplains to see the intense need for resilience-focused interventions and programs. The identification of available resources is a vital tool for any chaplain’s toolbox; therefore, connecting people to these resources must be one of the chaplain’s responsibilities.

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<sup>57</sup> These educational programs will be discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>58</sup> For example, the Fort Worth Fire Department Chaplain frequently refers firefighters and their families to the Firefighters Relief Association, Auxiliary Groups, and other Firefighter Benevolent Groups. These organizations will be described at length in the final chapter.

<sup>59</sup> Walsh, *Family Resilience*, 51.

The theoretical grounding for resilience stands on the premise that people may rebound from horrific events, stronger than before the crisis. In the fire service, this occurs because there is a greater sense of community, collaborative efforts, and cohesion. “Just as individuals survive and thrive best in significant relationships, families thrive best when connected to larger systems.”<sup>60</sup>

Walsh identifies a new model for strength based, family-centered approach:

Interventions that enhance positive interactions, supporting coping efforts, enhancing pride, and competence, and promoting more effective functioning. There is a new model of family-centered services based on the following core principles (Ooms & Preister, 1988):

Identifying and building on family strengths and resources that empower families; Taking a family-centered approach to individual problems; Providing flexible, holistic services; Emphasizing prevention and early intervention; Community-based and collaborative partnerships by professionals and families.<sup>61</sup>

Throughout this chapter, we have identified some of Walsh’s key factors that are associated with building and promoting a resilience-based pastoral care ministry. These include the following: Highly resilient people are connected to their faith, family, and social communities. Resilient individuals are optimistic, spiritual, persistent, insightful, adaptable to change, and committed to helping others. In chapter five, the reader will find descriptions of two strength-based preventive pastoral care programs. Critical Incident Stress Management Program and Fire Families focus on building relationships, community and connectedness through educational programs. We conclude this chapter with a quotation from Walsh:

Making meaning of adversity and by joining together, we strengthen our ability to overcome adversity. The idea of home also extends to a sense of community beyond the

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 240.

immediate family and is intertwined in meaning and experience. All concepts of self and constructions of the world are fundamentally products of relationships.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 51.

## CHAPTER 5

### IMPLICATIONS FOR THE MINISTRY OF PREVENTIVE PASTORAL CARE WITH FIREFIGHTERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

The chaplain, as a representative or stand-in for God, is privileged to stay with someone who is in emotional, physical, or spiritual pain, without trying to fix the person's problems, offer unsolicited advice, or recite religious platitudes. When people realize they are not alone in their time of suffering, the fact that the chaplain has not abandoned them may enable them to believe that God has not abandoned them either. It is amazing how a counselee will remark to the chaplain, "I don't remember what you said. I know it made sense at the time. All I remember was that you stayed with me."<sup>63</sup>

Chaplains are representatives of God's presence, love, mercy, and grace. While it is true that chaplains spend a great deal of time providing pastoral crisis intervention, they also devote much time to preventive pastoral care. The chaplain's role in building resilience-based and strength-based preventive pastoral care programs will be the heart of this chapter. Earlier we explored fire chaplain ministry and identified the need to promote healthy emotional, physical, social, and spiritual lifestyles. Drawing from my chaplaincy experience, I have identified some characteristics that contribute to a well-functioning fire service family.

The most prevalent features are firefighters' strong sense of community and the emotional connectedness that exist between this work group. During their 24 hours shifts, they share joys and concerns, and many firefighters know intimate details about their co-workers challenges at home and at work.

Their unique personality characteristics are contributing factors that promote resilience. Mitchell and Bray believe firefighters have personalities that are unique and different from the

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<sup>63</sup> Naomi K. Paget and Janet R. McCormack, *The Work Of The Chaplain* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2006), 9, 10.



average person with a less demanding job. Firefighters are “action and task oriented, motivated by external factors, quick decision makers, and have a strong need to be needed.”<sup>64</sup> The combinations of personalities with work environment produce an exclusive subculture that is commonly inherent to fire departments worldwide. The fire service community is a culture that is often taken for granted by firefighters but is not usually recognized by the general public. Fire chaplains ministering to this group should have a deep understanding of this subculture. The fire service, like any mission field, requires ministers to know and understand both internal and external dynamics of the indigenous group they are called to serve. Some of those dynamics brought forward in previous chapters include the following.

Firefighters desire to help others and most believe God has called them into the field of emergency work. Firefighters rebound from the pressures of emergency work because they believe they do make a difference in the lives of the citizens they help. Some say “We do the best we can given the circumstances.” This statement acknowledges one’s limitations, but also one’s desire to do everything possible to save a life.

A career in firefighting gives individuals many advantages for self-advancement. These may include pursuing advanced certifications, college degrees, and part-time employment. We also explored the satisfaction one receives by serving others. The fire service family becomes a surrogate faith community when there is a tragedy. Collaborative-based relationships occur because of the tradition of community within the fire service. This universal phenomenon may be observed when firefighters go to great lengths to help their brother and sister firefighters; thus, a kinship bond connects these individuals.

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<sup>64</sup> For a more extensive listing of personality characteristics refer to Jeffrey Mitchell and Grady Bray, *Emergency Services Stress*, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1990), 19.

Firefighters are dedicated to their families and their careers. Attrition is low and most retire after 30 to 35 years of dedicated service to their communities. They are brave, courageous, and selfless when it comes to rescuing a fellow firefighter or a complete stranger. Their strong sense of duty to serve others parallels their strong need to be needed.

Sharing meals builds community and cohesiveness. Table fellowship brings persons together to share food and conversation. Camaraderie and teamwork transpire between crewmembers when they prepare and eat their meals together, therefore, time spent around the table, at work and home, gives individuals an occasion to reconnect.

Throughout this project, the focus has been on strengths, but careers in the fire and emergency medical services also carry with them some inherent challenges for professional and familial relationships.

Every fire department family has its own script pertaining to how a couple or family copes and functions with the job and schedule. No two families are alike. Spouses develop scripts in dealing with each other as a result of the job or job schedule. For example, a spouse might choose to avoid a particularly heated issue because it is convenient if the firefighter leaves for a long shift and part-time job. The time separation between spouses can be a luxury or a liability. There is a possibility of a single-parent phenomenon associated with fire service families. Children may tend to act out when one parent is away at work. Spouses might view a firefighter's loyalty to the profession as problematic in the relationship. Like other occupations, spillover stress is a problem.<sup>65</sup>

When the time separation is perceived as a liability, families have a tendency to focus on the negative aspects of shift work. Some believe family emergencies always occur when the firefighter is on duty. Others have difficulty adapting to a schedule where firefighters must work

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<sup>65</sup> Robert Smith, "How to Balance the Two Families of Firefighting," *Fire Chief* (February 1, 2002), [http://firechief.com/mag/firefighting\\_balance\\_two\\_families/](http://firechief.com/mag/firefighting_balance_two_families/).

on anniversaries, birthdays, and holidays. Many family members are concerned about the dangers of firefighting and the high level of uncertainty that their firefighter may ever return home after a shift. Like the public, fire families have financial and health concerns. An injured firefighter may be concerned about his or her physical ability to ever perform firefighting tasks again. An individual's identity dependent upon one's career as a firefighter, may be compromised when active firefighting is no longer an option.

Nuclear and extended families may have a strong bond with the fire service, but some may disconnect when disaster strikes. Blame is often placed on fire department bureaucratic systems and its members. Chaplains become mediators and advocates helping these families through supportive pastoral care efforts.

In previous chapters, we identified positive contributions that firefighters are making to their families. Firefighters contribute more time rearing their children and managing their household; therefore, significant others react positively to the egalitarian relationships. People are happier and more satisfied with collaborative relationships that promote reciprocity and equal division of labor. I hope that there will be fewer divorces because firefighters are playing a more active role in care-giving efforts. With an aging population and a decrease in financial resources, more elderly parents rely upon their children for care. There is an increase in the number of firefighters caring for their elderly relatives. Most firefighters value their family members and make their family members a priority. Our families of origin help shape our belief system as well as our social and moral values. These qualities may be a function of our ethnicity, socioeconomic

status, or personal preference. Froma Walsh understands the family belief system to be the “heart and soul of resilience.”<sup>66</sup>

These values and beliefs often spillover into the workplace. Roberta Gilbert, a family systems theorist writes: “If people spend enough time together they begin to form an emotional system similar to that of the family. Indeed sometimes people spend more time in their organizations than in their families.”<sup>67</sup>

Firefighters spend a minimum of 240 hours every month working at the fire station. Gilbert confirms that one’s work group and nuclear family are structural complexes of patterned relationships where wholeness or unity within these subsystems is reflected in the interdependence among its members.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, cooperation and clear communication are important for maintaining cohesion between the subsystems at work and home.

A firefighter’s interdependence and reliance on other team members may make the difference between life and death in an emergency.<sup>69</sup> A safety slogan reads “Two in and two out.” This cooperative nature of firefighting requires a mutual trust and understanding that communicates that “no one will be left behind.” As aforementioned, their intrinsic strengths and coping skills help strengthen resilience.

While it is helpful to identify characteristics that promote resilience, we must also acknowledge the stressful situations that create challenges for firefighters and their families.

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<sup>66</sup> Walsh, *Family Resilience*, 50. For a detailed description of these beliefs refer to Table 3.1 on page 50.

<sup>67</sup> Gilbert, *Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory*, 22.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> “The conceptional connection of physical functioning and family emotional process is anchored in two theoretical assumptions . . . an interrelationship between emotional and physical functioning within the individual and . . . the emotional functioning of others significant to that person.” Michael Kerr and Murray Bowen, *Family Evaluation: An Approach Based on Bowen Theory*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 51.

The carnage which emergency workers see, smell, touch, hear, and even taste often leaves an oppressive imprint on their minds and souls.<sup>70</sup> Sometimes, emergency workers identify with a victims pain and suffering because they remind them of their own family members. These horrific situations that produce emotional, physical, and cognitive reactions are defined as “critical incidents.” Jeffrey Mitchell coined the term “critical incident.” He defines it as:

A turning point event. A critical incident is often called a crisis event. A critical incident is any event which has a stressful impact sufficient enough to overwhelm the usually effective coping skill of either an individual or a group. Critical incidents are typically sudden, powerful events which are outside of the range of ordinary human experiences. Because they are so sudden and unusual, they can have a strong emotional effect even on well-trained, experienced people.<sup>71</sup>

Critical incidents are events such as: line-of-duty deaths and injuries; death or serious injury of a baby or child; and multi-casualty and multi-fatality scenes. Although firefighters seem to recover quickly after crisis events, chaplains may encourage stress reduction through the implementation and coordination of a program entitled Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM). Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) is a comprehensive program designed to alleviate and avert the harmful consequences of distress often associated with traumatic events. A brief overview of this proactive process will focus on the ways in which CISM promotes stress hardiness by building community.

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<sup>70</sup> “Martin Seligman’s belief that the soul—that which is deep within the personality—is the key to change, and that our change efforts must take the human spirit into account.” Walsh, 73.

<sup>71</sup> Jeffrey Mitchell and George Everly, *Critical Incident Stress Debriefing: (CISD) An Operations Manual For The Prevention Of Traumatic Stress Among Emergency Services and Disaster Workers*, (Maryland: Chevron Publishing Corporation, 1993), 6.

Jeffrey Mitchell, firefighter, paramedic, and disaster psychologist developed Critical Incident Stress Management as an intervention to mitigate and prevent the development of post-traumatic stress disorders.

Mitchell and Everly write:

Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) . . . . A wide range of programs and intervention strategies which have been designed to prevent stress in emergency personnel and to assist them in managing and recovering from significant stress should they encounter it in their work. CISM is much broader than just Critical Incident Stress Debriefings (CISD). It contains many special programs and strategies including pre-incident education, significant other support programs, defusings, demobilizations, debriefings, on-scene support services, follow-up services, community outreach programs, individual consults, peer counseling, initial discussions, crisis intervention training, disaster preparedness, and disaster assistance programs.<sup>72</sup>

Chaplains coordinate CISM and set goals to build resilience by lessening the destructive grasp that traumatic events have on emergency workers. This task requires a proactive step toward prevention rather than merely reacting. This walk toward preventive pastoral care helps mitigate anxiety and duress before they become unmanageable. A successful strength-based approach begins with pre-incident educational sessions.

Chaplains teach pre-incident CISM classes to firefighters at the beginning of their careers. In this stress awareness class chaplains convey information about what constitutes a critical incident, identification of normal reactions, and healthy coping skills. This initial training session provides an opportunity for chaplains to develop rapport with recruits.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 11.

One component of CISM is the Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD), a seven-phase formal group process conducted days or weeks after a critical incident occurred. Debriefing teams are generally composed of chaplains, mental health professionals, and peer support personnel, that includes firefighters, paramedics, nurses, and police officers. The type of incident and type of emergency worker involvement determines the specific peer support personnel needed for a particular debriefing. A properly trained chaplain may facilitate the debriefing with the assistance of peer support. Debriefings give affected workers an opportunity to talk in a group about their experiences at the scene of a tragedy. Therefore, community is built when these workers share their common experiences of frustration and helplessness. Individuals also connect when their shared stories reveal common themes and reactions. Chaplains play a key role in normalizing reactions and affirming strengths. The chaplain's presence may bring comfort and lessen the anxiety for those being debriefed.

There are several assumptions, both theological and ethical, which affect the way one deals with crisis events. The first is the concept of humanity. How do emergency responders' views of human life affect their thoughts about the care they give and their ability to deal with stressful situations? The loss of life, any life, is tragic and when chaplains deal with one who has witnessed many losses, it is crucial not to minimize the value of the lives lost, especially that of children. Life is precious in the eyes of caregivers, or else they would not choose this profession. Chaplains should know when firefighters' lives may have been threatened, because, steps should be taken to ensure that both the firefighters and the victim's life is valued and validated. During the debriefing chaplains should emphasize the positive aspects of the incident and acknowledge the intense effort that took place, regardless of the end result.

A superb example of a debriefing may be found in the New Testament. Shortly after the crucifixion of Jesus, two of his disciples walked along the way to Emmaus. They encountered a stranger who wondered about the tragic events they were discussing. The disciples were surprised that he did not know of the presumed messiah, so they proceeded to tell him all about what happened. During their walk, they were in effect, debriefed about this critical incident. When they realized who they were speaking with, they experienced a great, joyful relief (Luke 24). When dealing with participants in a debriefing, or on the scene of a critical incident, they need to be given the opportunity to confront their own “Jesus” in their experience.

To promote and foster a resilience-based family approach, critical incident stress information may be taught as part of the “Fire Families Support Program.”<sup>73</sup> Information given in advance to family members may increase their awareness of normal cognitive, emotional, physical, and spiritual reactions to traumatic events. Many partners may identify times when their loved one has responded to a traumatic event. Family members often observe changes in their firefighter’s behavioral patterns, such as an increase in irritability, fatigue, and frustration. Family members may have difficulty understanding their loved ones sensitivity to the event, and their attitude of attaching more importance to the incident than the family does.

Firefighters often exclude their family members from discussions about traumatic scenes. Some choose to talk with their loved ones about their encounters, while many emotionally withdraw, for fear they will worry their families. Firefighters share more information with family members, than those who work in healthcare, law enforcement, and emergency service career fields. Moreover, an interconnected professional knowledge base promotes an open communication and connectedness between professionals in the emergency service community.

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<sup>73</sup> In 1994, Cameron Brown developed the Fire Families Support Program for the Fort Worth Fire Department. Chapters 1 and 2 of this program may be found in Appendix B.



Most firefighters whose partners do not work in the emergency service community say “She will never understand” or “He is not interested in my work.” Chaplains may be instrumental in building these bridges of communication. Pastoral care programs led by the chaplain may help these couples discover the best way for them to talk about their work experiences.

Firefighting and emergency medical service personnel use jargon that is unique to their professions. Firefighters are tool and task-oriented. Therefore, when asked to share their work experiences, they may give only facts. This is restricting and may disrupt effective family communication because family members may be unfamiliar with firefighting terminology, equipment, and their emergency responders’ own roles and responsibilities. As a result, the family members’ lack of knowledge and familiarization with the fire service inhibit effective communication.

Fire Families Support Program which is a resilience-based program works best when implemented and coordinated by the fire chaplain. It is a preventive pastoral care curriculum designed for chaplains to use when teaching family members about the fire service. Classes cover tool and apparatus identification, firefighter roles and responsibilities, emergency service stressors, and offers healthy coping strategies. This family-centered course starts when newly hired firefighters begin their training academies.

In Fort Worth newly employed fire recruits attend classes at the Fort Worth Fire Department Training Academy for six months. The Fire Families Support Program, facilitated by the chaplain, starts at orientation on the first day of training. Since the fire department is family-centered, an individual’s nuclear family, family of origin, and extended members are invited to attend.

Family members are greeted by the fire chief, fire chaplain, and training staff. These employees emphasize “the fire department is a family and a community” that supports its members through programs such as Fire Chaplaincy, Fire Families, Fort Worth Firefighters Association Local 440 Auxiliary, and the Firefighters Relief Association. The chaplain calls attention to the available chaplaincy services which include hospital and home visitation, baptisms, marriages, pastoral crisis interventions, and pastoral counseling services. For future reference, the chaplain gives families a list of resources, contact persons, and phone numbers.

After a month the chaplain meets again with these families and invites them to identify their current challenges. Some frequently disclosed familial struggles include: financial difficulties; decrease in quality and quantity of family time; the stressful impact that studying firefighting manuals has on the individual and the family; and on-going stressors associated with the unfair division of household responsibilities and childcare. This informal assessment helps the chaplain identify challenges that recruits and their families are facing. The chaplain may later meet with these families individually or refer them to other community resources. Meeting with individual members gives the chaplain an opportunity to build a good rapport with these young families early in their firefighting career.

The next meeting with new recruits and their families occurs at an event entitled “Fire Families’ Mini Academy.” After approximately two months into their academic study, new recruits learn firefighting operations and procedures. This mini fire academy is designed to empower new recruits to better communicate with their families by showing them firefighting skills.

The mini academy starts in a classroom where the chaplain meets with recruits and their families to discuss any new challenges they may be facing and to assess their coping strategies.

Shortly afterwards, firefighters and their family members report to the fire training ground to learn the “tools of the trade.” Loved ones wear their firefighters’ protective gear, and if they so choose, participate in fire ground operations. This mini course helps family members become familiar with firefighting tools, practice techniques, and experience some of the grueling physical and emotional stress. Families will also learn firefighting and emergency medical service jargon. This newfound knowledge, will hopefully, open space for future conversations. Many say that the knowledge gained from their participation promotes healthier communication. Firefighters are proud and honored to teach their families, and hope their efforts will be the key that keeps future conversations open and flowing.

Critical incident stress is a subject of interest for families. The chaplain teaches this initial pre-incident class to recruits during the first 6 weeks of training but may teach families at anytime. Class objectives are to increase the family member’s awareness of stressors associated with firefighting and emergency care. Special attention is given to the identification of stressors, normal reactions to critical incident stress, and ways in which family members may help their firefighters to cope.

After graduation, the next familial educational session is called Fire Families Ride Along. This event is for family members to get together and spend the night at the fire station. The chaplain organizes and facilitates this fifteen-hour program which is usually scheduled for a Saturday afternoon. Family members help prepare a meal at the fire station. They experience some of the stressors associated with preparing a meal for 19 people. During this time, an emergency tone may sound, and family members are expected to respond with the engine company or fire department van to observe the emergency. They may experience a full range of interruptions to meal preparation, eating, and sleeping.

Throughout the night, the chaplain drives family members to observe emergency operations at vehicle accidents, structure fires, and emergency medical calls. At 7:00 am the morning tone sounds, and family members watch shift change and listen to firefighters exchange pertinent information and observe the friendly bantering that accompanies this morning ritual.

Family members are extremely exhausted due to lack of sleep, excitement, anxiety, and the high level of uncertainty associated with responding to emergency calls. Many firefighters give positive feedback and report “That was the best experience for my partner; now he or she understands the uncertainty, anxiety, and fatigue that results from a sleepless night at the fire station.” They believe their partners are more understanding; therefore, they make fewer demands for chores and other activities to be accomplished on a firefighter’s first day off. The chaplain’s facilitation of the Fire Families Program empowers family members to connect with each other and the fire service community as a whole.

Firefighters call chaplains to counsel with them and their families for a variety of reasons. After responding to a critical incident, a firefighter may have a crisis of faith because he or she does not understand how God can allow an innocent child to be abused. Relationship concerns are common and range from a significant other’s difficulty adapting to a 24-hour routine to extra-marital affairs.

Chaplains should set good boundaries and acknowledge their limitations when counseling with this population. Keeping an updated resource list of counseling services is paramount; thus, the chaplain will not be restricted nor expected to provide these services. A helpful resource for counseling may be an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). These programs often have a pre-determined number of free visits and are designed to help individuals suffering with depression, substance abuse, job-related stress, relationship difficulties, and anger management. Knowledge

of additional community resources will also empower the chaplain to better meet the needs of a diverse population. Chaplains do not need to be experts in all areas to meet the needs of firefighters and their families. Those chaplains trained and credentialed to do counseling, should inform counselees about the limitations of confidentiality. This communication about limitations helps develop a trusting relationship with counselees. These limitations may vary from state-to-state, but reportable issues usually include incidents of child and elder abuse and neglect, and threats to self and others.<sup>74</sup>

In addition to CISM and Fire Families Program, Chaplains may be called upon to facilitate a variety of pastoral care classes that will strengthen individual and family resilience. These classes may address issues of faith development, Bible studies, spiritual direction, effective communication skills, understanding grief, compassion fatigue, financial planning, family decision making, and parenting skills.

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<sup>74</sup> In Texas, *Rule 505: Communications to Members of Clergy* identifies the rules for clergy privilege.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, throughout this project I have attempted to identify the chaplain's role in providing and promoting resilience-based pastoral care through supportive resources and community networks. Firefighters are more resilient because of their strong sense of community, and their commitments to God, each other, and their families. They are connected with their co-workers because of their shared space, time, and goals to help others regardless of the costs. The tradition of community within the fire service surpasses all outsiders' understanding and in times of crisis, acts as a faith community that comes together to meet the needs of the group.

Chaplains promote emotional and spiritual hardiness to stress. Their ministry of presence brings God's ever-abiding comfort that transcends all time and space. In the biblical narrative of Abraham and Sarah, we saw that their human characteristics not their actions prompted God's ever-abiding presence. God desired to be in relationship with this family; therefore, God chooses to be present for this family. An individual's connectedness and personal relationships with God, family, and community are foundational to their ability to rebound from traumatic life events.

All human beings are inherently valuable in the eyes of our Creator God, and God wants to be in relationship with God's creation. The Deity's innermost desire to be in relationship with Abraham and his descendents transcends all time. Today, as representatives of God's love and compassion, chaplains respond to act out that loving grace by helping those in need. The chaplain meets with people who have fallen into the depths of a devastating crisis. Many feel alone or abandoned because they have lost someone very dear to them or lost hope that life will ever return to "normal." The chaplain, being a representative of God's mercy and grace, brings

the ministry of hope to all God's children. Chaplains go forth and serve all God's people regardless of faith tradition and national origin.

Chaplains are invited into the troubled sacred space that one can only share with God. They represent God's calm presence, healing, and comfort in the midst of the chaos. When a person is spiritually, emotionally, and physically healthy they are better able to face the challenges of a critical event and return at a similar or perhaps a higher level of coping than before the crisis.

Chaplains cannot meet every need for every individual; therefore, chaplains should identify resources in their respective communities. Preventive pastoral care programs that promote resilience in fire service families include Critical Incident Stress Management and Fire Families. The need for future strength-based programs are endless and research in this field may identify additional preventive pastoral care programs already in existence.

## FIRE CHAPLAIN SURVEY

A Fire Chaplain survey is needed. The purpose of the survey will be to learn from other chaplains' experiences. They will answer the following questions based upon their perceptions in providing pastoral care to firefighters. Their responses should include general comments about their ministries without disclosing any personal or confidential information about specific firefighters and their families. The following questions may be included in the survey.

1. What challenges do Fire Chaplains face when providing pastoral care to firefighters and their families?
2. How do personal qualities and virtues help people become more resilient?
3. What personal qualities have you observed in firefighters that promote resiliency?
4. What have you done in the past that has been helpful in your ministry to firefighters and their families?





Chaplains may use this survey to identify challenges, personal qualities, and types of ministries that promote resilience in fire service personnel. This survey will also help identify existing preventive and educational programs as well as the identification of the need for future programming and connection with community resources.

In conclusion, today, God is present to all. God empowers us, sustains us, and guides us to serve those who serve. Resilience is neither stagnant nor passive, it is ever-changing and we must actively engage our strengths to adapt to an ever-changing world. Learned optimism is a realistic attitude. Being optimistic about God's presence gives us strength to endure and rebound from the trails and tribulations of life. God promises to bring hope, comfort, healing, and calmness in the midst of the storms of life. God transformed negative events into positive experiences for Abraham, Sarah, and their descendents. As chaplains, God calls and "anoints" us to provide preventive pastoral and spiritual care to those facing adversities. It is the role of the chaplain to help individuals identify strengths not weaknesses, promote healing not pathology and engender hope not fear. We will conclude, as we began, with the words from the Prophet Isaiah:

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory (Isaiah 61:1-3, NRSV).

My concluding prayer—May God empower all chaplains, as they promote spiritual, emotional, and physical resilience to those whom God calls them to serve. May they follow the psalmist's example to bring, bind, proclaim, comfort, give, praise, and plant. When we are intentional about providing pastoral caregiving, we are assured that God will provide the strength and courage necessary to meet the challenges of working with fire service families. To God be the glory in everything we do. Amen.

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## APPENDICES



APPENDIX A

*SERVING THOSE WHO SERVE: BEGINNING A FIRE DEPARTMENT CHAPLAINCY  
PROGRAM*

# *Serving Those Who Serve*

## *Beginning A Fire Department Chaplaincy Program*



### **Federation of Fire Chaplains**

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# *The Beginning Of A Fire Department Chaplain Program*

The first major step has been accomplished, that is the fact that your department wants to start a chaplaincy program. The rest of this document will be directed toward providing the information needed to make your fire department chaplain as effective as possible.

Fire departments by tradition have had someone in the role of chaplain since the beginning of the organized fire service. In many departments, a local clergy person has been appointed chaplain to handle emergency situations within the department, such as serious injury to fire department members, line-of-duty deaths, including notification of family members, and suicides involving fire department members and their families. Chaplains have fulfilled a traditional ceremonial role by giving the invocation at fire department functions, and conducting weddings and funerals for fire department family members.

All too often, the functions normally handled by a chaplain have been taken over by members of the administrative staff and firefighters within the department. When needs arose and no one was available to handle them, the staff and members of the department would do their best to handle the crisis. In the modern fire service, numerous factors have made it very desirable to establish a formal position of chaplain. With all the pressures present today, the need for this position is found in all fire departments—paid or volunteer, large or small, private or public.

As our world becomes more complex, facing the problems of life becomes dramatically more difficult. What used to be a straightforward, clear path to follow becomes cluttered with inflation, the energy crisis, environmental pollution, nuclear accidents, increasing crime, escalating levels of violence, crowded living conditions, and extremely intrusive challenges to our personal values and beliefs. The pressures of living in a complicated world affect us all. Many become emotionally and spiritually crippled when they find that what used to “work” is no longer effective in coping with the pressures.

People under stress tend to look to public agencies and institutions for answers and services that will solve society’s problems. When programs and services fail to improve and simplify living conditions, the providers are subject to the outrage of a frustrated public. As a result, individual public servants, such as a firefighter, are confronted with stress-producing accusations of ineffectiveness, inefficiency, and ulterior motives when they attempt to help. The emergency service worker is confronted with making a living in a complex world, and with having to deal with disenchanted recipients of their services. At the same time, society seems to expect public servants to be immune to the effects of such stress. The emergency worker faces some very real risks if they even hint that the stress is too much or is getting to them. It is as if the firefighter is expected to be the “perfect” person. They are expected to solve problems, make the complex simple, and perform emergency responses without experiencing any emotional turmoil in the process.

Emergency service workers, such as firefighters, who respond to life-threatening situations have additional stresses surrounding their lives that most professions do not have.

## ***1. LEVEL OF UNCERTAINTY***

It is a fact that when the alarm sounds, firefighters are going to respond. ***THIS IS THEIR PROFESSION.*** There is no such thing as a routine call until after the incident is safely over. When the alarm hits, the firefighter faces the unknown and, all too often, becomes the victim of a service-related injury or even death. The family of the emergency worker is under the stress of not knowing what is going to happen at any given incident.

## 2. ***INTERPERSONAL TENSIONS***

Interpersonal tensions are constant within the emergency services simply because of the very nature of the profession. The fire service organization creates a rigid working environment with a strong, competitive mentality on the part of the emergency worker.

Most promotions are made from within the department. Firefighters compete against their fellow firefighters for advancement. Shift work often leads to tensions. Long periods of time are spent with coworkers in training, station and equipment maintenance, fire prevention inspections, and in highly intense emergency incidents. The adrenaline is often flowing just because they are on duty. This factor alone increases tensions as firefighters try to deal with each other and the public while the body is in a continual state of alarm.

Often tensions are heightened by the long hours spent in the fire station away from their families. The fire service becomes the second family for the firefighter. This also adds stressors to the life of the emergency responder.

## 3. ***EXTREME PHYSICAL CONDITIONS***

The difference between the tremendous physical pressures on the emergency worker, and a person in a profession that requires physical labor, is the manner in which the firefighters are called on to perform their duties. Average workers plan out their day to complete a particular task. Rest periods are planned to space out the use of their energy over a length of time. They can also plan around weather or other problems if the need arises.

Emergency responders are called upon to perform their task regardless of the climactic or environmental conditions. In a very short period of time they can be completely physically and mentally exhausted, yet they must still keep going until the task is completed. Many times they complete one exhausting response only to be called to another crisis without having time to fully recuperate. The body and the mind of a firefighter is frequently drained after a tour of duty far more than the average person in a physical occupation.

## 4. ***HUMAN TRAGEDY AND CARNAGE***

When something bad happens, the firefighter is going to be called upon to respond. Depending on the type, the intensity, the duration of the incident, and many other factors, this response can have some far-reaching effects on the emergency worker. The continued response to tragic situations must be dealt with properly. This specific problem in the firefighting/rescue profession demands the input of a chaplain or other qualified person able to identify the problems associated with response to human tragedy.

## 5. ***FEAR***

Fear of the incident or fear of danger does not usually have a negative impact on emergency workers. "Fear" of the incident and what could happen normally translates into being cautious and having respect for the type of procedures needed to perform the task with the utmost safety. It is the fear of making a mistake that could cost a coworker or victim their life or cause further injury that produces the highest level of stress. Emergency workers tend to be perfectionists. When things go wrong, they start asking questions like, "What if I had only...?" Often feelings of guilt have to be dealt with after a particularly sad event.

The uniqueness of the stressors mentioned here is that they face the emergency responder at all times. There is no time while they are on duty that these pressures are not present. When selecting a chaplain, or starting a chaplaincy program, these stresses need to be thoroughly understood. The chaplain must be able to recognize the signs of stress within department personnel and have methods to effectively help firefighters cope with the pressures they face on a daily basis.

## ***STARTING A CHAPLAINCY PROGRAM***

The first two steps in starting a chaplaincy program are confirming that your department wants the program, and then selecting the individual to be the chaplain. Assuming you have decided there is a need for a chaplain in your department, the problem of selecting the right person for the job is your next hurdle. Before making any selection, put into writing what your department expects to do or accomplish through the chaplaincy. Also decide what qualities you are looking for in the person that will serve as your fire department chaplain. These expectations need to be discussed with prospective chaplains during the selection process.

### **FINDING POTENTIAL CANDIDATES**

There are a number of methods that can be employed to assist you in finding the right person to be chaplain for your department.

1. Contact other fire departments, fire department chaplains, or the Federation of Fire Chaplains.
2. Look within your own department for a member who may also be a minister.
3. Check with your local ministerial alliance.
4. Look for persons who can provide ministry to department members of Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish beliefs. Or look for a person who is able to deal, without reservation, with all denominations and beliefs.
5. Consider your own personal knowledge of a clergy person who has shown an interest in, or would be good for, your department. Ask for suggestions from members of your fire department.
6. Appoint a committee to seek out candidates. Set times to meet and periodically review how the selection process is going.
7. Do not overlook those clergy persons that members of your department are most often calling for assistance.

Just as all people are not cut out to be firefighters, not all clergy can meet the needs of the emergency service. Just because an individual offers to assist does not mean he or she would be your best choice. Interview and run a background check, listen to recommendations, have the candidate visit with firefighters and get feedback as to whether the person would be able to build a confidential relationship with department members.

### **A CHAPLAIN HAS BEEN SELECTED**

Once the right person has been found, the chief of the department should meet with the chaplain to discuss what is expected from the standpoint of the fire department, and from the standpoint of the chaplain. Means of contacting the chaplain by telephone, pager, or radio must be decided upon. A mission statement might be addressed during this meeting, along with an orientation on fire department procedures.

For a period of time, the new chaplain should plan on visiting all stations and all divisions of the department. Building rapport with the firefighters is essential from the beginning of the program. A time to visit with the union or association leaders is also very important.

The new chaplain should be introduced to the entire department through a formal process. This introduction should include a memo to the department announcing the appointment of the chaplain, and a formal meeting with department members. The meeting could be conducted at a supper or a training. This would be a good time to present the new chaplain with a badge and identification card.

The chief should schedule a second meeting about ninety days after the appointment to evaluate the progress of the program. This meeting can be used to discuss changes that may be needed and guidelines for the program. It may also be good to establish a timetable for the development of the chaplaincy program within the department.

The department should enroll the new chaplain in the Federation of Fire Chaplains as soon as possible. This will provide the new chaplain with valuable materials, resources, and a network of fellow chaplains who can be called upon for information and support.

The chaplain must be fully supported by the chief administrator of the department and the department members if he or she is to be fully effective. Full support by the department is essential for the promotion of the fire department chaplaincy program. It is also essential to provide this support while allowing the chaplain to maintain strict confidentiality in his or her dealings with fire department members.

## ***DUTIES OF THE FIRE DEPARTMENT CHAPLAIN***

The following is a list of duties that may be incorporated into a chaplaincy program. The list does not include all the responsibilities that a chaplain can undertake, but it can be taken into consideration as you develop your individual department program.

### **1. Spiritual Guidance**

Two important functions of the fire department chaplain are to help firefighters and their families in times of crisis and to help them with their spiritual needs. Of all the many duties the chaplaincy may entail, these are the principle responsibilities. The chaplain may use different ways to bring about spiritual truths and assistance to an individual family. However, the most important ministry is to simply be available when called upon. Spiritual need is the greatest of all needs and the chaplain must be able to meet this need. It is also a hard area for many ministers to get a “handle on.” The spiritual witness is more often by action rather than by word. The example set by the chaplain in all phases of life has more bearing on the firefighter than “preaching” about it.

Another important part of these functions is to understand the personal religious needs of the firefighters and to call their own minister to assist as soon as possible, if the family so desires. The chaplain can then assist their minister to understand the functions and the resources available through the fire department. This particular area of the chaplaincy is given intense coverage at all chaplain seminars and conferences.

2. Assistance in Emergency Situations

Dealing with families when a disabling injury or a death occurs is a primary function of the chaplain. To provide the best service at this type of incident, the chaplain should respond as often as possible to all major fire situations. If an injury to a firefighter occurs, the chaplain should meet the firefighter at the hospital, quickly determine the extent of the injury from the hospital staff, and then notify the family in a manner that will not cause undue panic or grief. At the time of the initial call or contact with the family, a decision should be made as to whether the family will need transportation to the hospital. When the family arrives, the chaplain should have an accurate report concerning the firefighter's condition.

At fire incidents, the chaplain, if not involved in the actual work of the emergency, should be alert to the needs of the firefighters. The chaplain should be especially mindful that the type of people making emergency responses are easily capable of overexerting themselves to the point of exhaustion. Knowing this, the chaplain can make command officers aware of potentially dangerous situations that need immediate attention and/or medical attention.

At major fire incidents it is often the chaplain who is free to assist in handling unruly or hysterical people. This becomes a needed function at rescues, extrications, situations that draw a sizeable crowd, nursing homes, or incidents where children are involved. The importance of keeping a cool, calm demeanor during these times, along with the ability to explain to the public what is actually taking place, is a service the chaplain can perform. Comforting the bereaved and offering positive direction to the victim's family are priorities at these types of incidents. The chaplain can explain the types of assistance available to victims through the Red Cross, the Ladies Auxiliary, or other community service and benevolent organizations. When these interventions are used at the scene of an emergency, the results are generally successful in not only aiding the victims, but also in keeping distraught citizens from interfering with the performance of emergency operations.

3. Liaison With Hospitals and Clinics

A chaplain should frequently visit local hospitals and medical clinics to build rapport with medical personnel. These visits help the chaplain to receive accurate and helpful reports from the hospital professionals who have confidence in the chaplain with whom they have become acquainted. This information aids the family of the firefighter in understanding what is taking place and to better understand the condition of their family member.

4. Explaining Insurance and Benefits

The chaplain should be knowledgeable of referrals to insurance and compensatory benefits available to the firefighters and to their families. These benefits come from many different sources such as insurance carried by the fire department, the municipality, the state, and the federal government. Many fire departments have their own relief associations, blood banks, and other benefits to aid their own sick and injured members.

5. Conducting/Assisting at Funerals

The chaplain can assist a family in funeral arrangements for both active and retired firefighters. They may even officiate at the service or assist the family minister. Assistance frequently is done in the form of organizing the details of the funeral service. Details to be considered include establishing an honor guard, preparing fire department apparatus for the funeral procession, organizing fire department members at the church or funeral home and at the cemetery, determining the location of the funeral, and arranging for procession escorts. The chaplain must develop a good working relationship with local funeral directors to help them understand the special rituals involved in a fire department funeral.

Support and consolation for the firefighter's family and children are responsibilities of the chaplain. The chaplain should always send condolences at the time of death of any member of a fire department and represent the department by offering any assistance needed. This is a responsibility of the fire department chaplain that should never be neglected.

6. Weddings

The chaplain may be called upon to perform weddings for fire department personnel. Wedding etiquette, premarital counseling, and the actual performance of the ceremony are areas of expertise that the chaplain should take special care to develop. The chaplain should make known to department members any preferences held toward the actual wedding ceremony.

7. Counseling

The daily pressures of the society in which we live has greatly contributed to the need for competent, caring counsel. It is not recommended that the chaplain should attempt to conduct counseling in all areas. The need for counseling in the areas of marriage, profession, family, substance abuse, delinquency, children, finances, critical incident stress management, and a host of other problem areas can quickly overwhelm an overzealous chaplain. The chaplain should be aware of the basics in these areas, and be knowledgeable of the type of help individuals may need. If the chaplain does not feel qualified, or for some reason is not able to counsel with a firefighter or family member, it is necessary to be able to direct them to a qualified counselor. Counselors may be available through members of an employee assistance program or other resources developed by the chaplain.

8. Visitation

A great deal of comfort, spiritual aid, friendship, and solid supportive help can be given to the sick, distraught, and injured through personal contact. Regular visitation at home, in the work place, and in the hospital is an important function of the chaplain. It is an excellent time for the chaplain to represent the administration and let the firefighter know that the department is thinking about him or her and is concerned about his or her welfare.

9. Availability

The chaplain must be available seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. When the chaplain cannot be available, it should be made known and someone else made available to fill in. In order for the chaplain to be available at all times, it is necessary for the fire department headquarters or dispatcher to be able to contact him or her by telephone, pager, or radio at all times. It is advisable for transportation to be made available, either through the furnishing of a vehicle or through a transportation fund to assist in the cost of responding. The expense fund should include all unusual expenses incurred in administering the chaplain's duties.

10. Gaining Respect

Gaining the respect of fire department members is a must for the effectiveness and credibility of the chaplain. It should be noted that respect cannot be demanded, it must be earned by the chaplain as he or she works to develop a relationship with the fire department administration and members. Respect comes as the chaplain demonstrates commitment, dedication, and care for firefighters and their families. The chaplain gains respect by showing respect for members of the department through his or her words and actions. The chaplain earns respect by continuing to participate in fire department activities, emergency and routine, regardless of how hard the going may get.



11. Attending Functions of the Fire Department

The chaplain may be called upon to represent the fire department at official functions or public meetings to give an invocation, dedicatory prayer, or benediction. Many times the chief and other active members of the department or city administrators are tied up with important meetings or scheduled activities. It may fall to the chaplain to represent these people at social functions, homes, hospitals, before civic groups, or to other fire departments.

It is often the chaplain who carries expressions of sympathy, condolences, or congratulations to firefighters and their families. In today's fire service it is becoming more and more difficult for the fire chief to make all the required personal contacts with firefighters and their families. This can be a valuable function that the chaplain can perform for the chief to meet the needs of the rank and file department members and communicate messages from the administration.

12. Communications With Firefighters

Communications with firefighters has been mentioned in different ways throughout this document. Communication in one form or another is the most important service the chaplain provides and is greatly needed by fire service personnel. Personal, direct contact by visiting fire personnel should be built into every chaplaincy program. Visiting fire stations at least once a month on alternating shifts is a good practice in the fire service chaplaincy.

Communications also takes place through telephone calls, sending letters or cards on Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, and other special occasions. Sympathy cards can be sent to those in need, as well as congratulations for marriages, births, promotions, special recognition for valor, etc. A monthly or quarterly prayer breakfast or meeting with interested personnel is an important phase of the chaplaincy. All of the foregoing methods of communication are recommended practices that will build relationships and keep lines of communication open between the chaplain and the firefighters that are served.

13. Retired Firefighters

A major effort should be made by the chaplain to assist retired firefighters and their families. This can be done by keeping in touch with the leaders of the retired firefighters association and by being alert to notice the needs of retired personnel. Chaplains should be available to minister to the needs of retired personnel as they would for active duty firefighters.

14. Teaching Training Classes

The teaching of training classes by the fire department chaplain should not be overlooked by department administration. Classes can be taught on the resources and services available through the chaplaincy program, critical incident stress management, family life, chain of command, ethics, and many other areas. Frequently classes on integrity and moral responsibilities are taught by the chaplain. This area of service should be considered from the beginning stages of the chaplaincy program.

15. Program Director

The chaplain is often considered the personnel service officer or crisis management coordinator. The coordination of the critical incident response team can fall under the duties of the chaplain. In some departments the chaplain is a representative of the employee assistance program.

### *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 firefighters and their families. The fire department administrator considering a chaplaincy program can rest 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, you may not consider to be needs for your department. The next steps are to weigh, consider, investigate, and determine your needs and wants. Then institute the chaplaincy program in your department.

To the chaplain reviewing these guidelines, accept the chaplaincy with pride but serve in it with humility, constantly calling on God for strength and wisdom.

# **XYZ Fire Department**

## **Fire Department Chaplain Position Description**

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

### **APPOINTMENT**

- 1.1 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 XYZ Fire Department.
- 1.2 The Chaplain will be appointed by written order of the Fire Chief.

### **QUALIFICATIONS AND TRAINING**

- 2.1 The individual appointed to the position of Fire Department Chaplain will be:
  - a. An ordained member of the clergy
  - 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.
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 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.
  - c. Fire department pager.
  - d. Chaplain's business cards.

# XYZ Fire Department

## Fire Department Chaplain Position Description

### 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.

3.1 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 will 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 department members' 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.

# **XYZ Fire Department**

## **Fire Department Chaplain Position Description**

### **3.2 Follow-Up Actions.**

#### **a. On-the-Scene Duties:**

1. Provide appropriate victim assistance to free operational personnel for fire fighting 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 fire fighters engaged in fire fighting 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.

### **3.3 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.

# **XYZ Fire Department**

## **Fire Department Chaplain Position Description**

- b. Duties outside the fire department.
  - 1. Represent and interpret fire department goals and concerns to the churches and religious institutions of 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 concern 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 communications a person makes to the Chaplain is on a strictly confidential basis and will not be released to department members or any other person. 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 becomes 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 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 (i.e. any family member covered under the department's death leave provisions).



## **Fire Chaplain Training Institute**

To complement and help implement the material in this booklet, “Serving Those Who Serve,” the Federation of Fire Chaplains has established the Chaplain Training Institute. The goal of the Institute is to provide training by experienced instructors in areas that are significant to the fire chaplaincy. Such training sessions may benefit both the new and experienced chaplain by presenting new materials and sharing experiences with each other. The Institute sponsors formal training sessions at different locations throughout the year.

For specific information, please contact the Executive Director of the FFC.

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*for*

**Federation of Fire Chaplains**



APPENDIX B

*FIRE FAMILIES: FAMILY SUPPORT AND AWARENESS*

# Fire Families: Family Support and Awareness

Cameron Lynn Brown  
Fire Families  
1994

## **Family Support and Awareness Program**

### Objectives of Family Support Training

- To provide significant others with an understanding of the personality traits of the emergency worker.
- To identify all aspects of emergency work that produce stress.
- To assist significant others in recognition of signs and symptoms of distress.
- To identify the impact of emergency service careers on family members.
- To provide survival tactics for emergency providers and their families.
- To provide ongoing education on communication techniques.

## **IMPORTANT FACTORS IN TRAINING**

1. **Ice Breakers.** These only take a few minutes but are fun and help to refresh the mind during the long hours of training.
2. **Mix Teaching Methods.** Present lessons in a variety of ways so that information is reinforced and integrated.
3. **Role Model.** While teaching, the instructor should be modeling the behaviors and concepts that are being taught.
4. **Student Involvement.** Use a variety of techniques that get participants involved as much as possible.
5. **Include Everyone.** Call people by name and try to get each person recognized in other ways. Additionally, this concept helps build confidence.

## LESSON I: EMERGENCY SERVICE STRESSORS AND PERSONALITY TRAITS

- GOAL:** To heighten the participants' awareness of emergency service stressors and personality traits unique to the fire service.
- OBJECTIVE:** Given information on types of stressors, participants will identify and give examples of environmental, psychosocial, and personality stressors associated with emergency work.
- Following this exercise, the participants will describe the personality traits of emergency workers.
- PURPOSE:** Educating emergency workers and their significant others increase their awareness of emergency work stressors. Also, personality traits can contribute to one's desire to be an emergency worker and to one's commitment and dedication to their career and family.
- PRESENTATION:** Participants are requested to refer to their handouts on emergency services stressors. The instructor gives a summary of the stressors and requests feedback on the ways in which these stressors can influence emergency workers and their families.
- After completing this introduction, the participants are requested to place their chairs in a circle formation. Each person is given a handout on personality traits and requested to refer to this handout during the following exercise: Each participant chooses a balloon, blows up the balloon, and then bursts the balloon to get out the small piece of paper. The instructor asks each individual to read and complete the statement written on the paper. The group identifies personality traits that the individual describes. The instructor lists the traits on a flipchart or board.
- After everyone has had an opportunity to complete their statements, the instructor summarizes personality traits and how these characteristics affect the emergency worker and family. Finally, the instructor requests comments and questions from the participants.
- METHODS:** Discussion, group activity
- MATERIALS:** Handouts on Emergency Stressors  
Balloons with questions  
Handouts on Personality Traits  
Flipchart or Board  
Markers

## **EMERGENCY SERVICES STRESSORS**

### **ENVIRONMENTAL**

- External situations that pertain to nature or conditions in the surrounding environment.
- Noise
- Confined space
- Weather conditions
- Pressures of rapid response
- Rapid decision-making
- Citizens observing incident

### **PSYCHOSOCIAL**

- Psychosocial stressors are anything to do with contact with nuclear or extended family and work relationships.

#### **Family Stressors**

- Shift work
- Financial pressures
- Lack of quality time
- Marital conflicts
- Raising children
- Household responsibilities

#### **Job Stressors**

- Conflicts with administration
- Abusive patients
- Media at the scene
- Restrictions on scope of practice
- Unpredictable changes
- Dangerous situations
- Lack of appreciation and recognition by superiors

## **PERSONALITY TRAITS OF EMERGENCY WORKERS**

### **1. Perfectionist**

Obsessive/compulsive

Low tolerance for incompetence

High expectations of success

Second-guessing, brood over mistakes

Idealistic

Hard workers

### **2. Control Oriented**

Use, need control

May be rigid, inflexible

Use terminology of control

Control of others, situations, and self

Can lead to frustration

### **3. Low Emotional Expression**

Sit on their emotions - part of the control

Tool and task-oriented

Talk in terms of situational problems, i.e. number of runs, lack of recognition, and lack of resources

#### **4. Other Characteristics**

Dedicated

Hardworking

Duty to family

Help giver

Loyal

Honest, trustworthy

Highly responsible

Action oriented

Risk takers



***PERSONALITY TRAITS***  
***Questions for Balloon Activity***

1. When I make a mistake on the job, I...
2. When someone makes a mistake on the job I...
3. I worry about...
4. I know I overload or take on too much responsibility because...
5. Sometimes I feel I should have done better even though I know there was no way I could have done so. An example is...
6. The rules at my house are...
7. I often tell family members what to do because...
8. Ways I demonstrate self-control are...
9. I do not like change because...
10. I like to know what to expect because...
11. I get frustrated because...
12. I do not like to show emotions because...
13. I hide my emotions by...
14. When I get upset/sad I...
15. Family members describe my personality as...
16. I tolerate a lot at the station because...
17. I am most dedicated to...
18. The most important thing about my job is...
19. The profession I would rather be in is...
20. It is important to help others because...

## **LESSON II: CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS**

**GOAL:** To strengthen the participants' awareness of critical incident stress and to observe how the debriefing process empowers individuals to normalize their reactions to a critical incident.

**OBJECTIVE:** Given information on the definition of a critical incident, participants will identify specific conditions that require debriefings.

Given information on physical, cognitive, and emotional reactions, individuals will discuss how to minimize these transitory symptoms.

**PURPOSE:** Critical incidents commonly result from situations in which there is an imminent threat to life. The threat may be to the emergency workers or to the citizens. Educating the emergency workers and their families about critical incident stress and the debriefing process will mitigate the degree of anxiety often associated with talking about particular situations. Family members will have a better understanding of the emergency worker's behaviors and emotional pain. Participants will learn coping strategies and general guidelines for healthy living.

**PRESENTATION:** Participants are requested to refer to their critical incident stress handouts as the instructor defines critical incidents. The instructor asks the participants to list examples of critical incidents on a blank sheet of paper. Class discussion follows with a focus on what made each of the incidents a traumatic experience and how did the emergency worker react. Partners are questioned about their observations of behaviors that followed critical incidents.

On completing this introduction, the emergency workers participate in a mock debriefing. The emergency workers are seated in an inner circle while the partners are seated in an outer circle. The instructor facilitates the debriefing with the assistance of peer debriefers.

After completing the debriefing, the emergency workers are asked about their thoughts and reactions to the group process. After summarizing the emergency workers' responses, the partners are given an opportunity to discuss their observations. The instructor summarizes the debriefing process, reactions, and coping strategies.

**METHODS:** Lecture, discussion, and role-play

**MATERIALS:**

Handouts on Critical Incident Stress

Index cards with scenarios stating specific roles for emergency workers

Index cards for partners to list the emergency workers' behaviors and attitudes during the debriefing.

Flipchart to list examples of critical incidents

## **CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS**

Critical incidents are incidents of extraordinary magnitude that possibly introduce exceptional physical and emotional turmoil. Typically, this would be a disaster caused by fire, airplane crash, building collapse, multiple fatalities, explosion, toxic contamination, death or injury of a co-worker, and the death or injury of children. Incidents involving children produce many profound effects. Incidents where co-workers are injured or killed may be the hardest of all for emergency responders.

### **REACTIONS CAUSED BY CRITICAL INCIDENTS**

No two people react to disaster in the same way, but several patterns of behavior have been studied following critical incidents. Given the chaos or horror of a disaster, stress reaction stems from the resulting emotional pain. Emotional pain is as real as physical pain, and feeling this hurt is part of the recovery process. These responses are a normal reaction to an abnormal circumstance. Stress-related symptoms are transitory; long-term detrimental effects are relatively rare.

#### **PHYSICAL REACTIONS**

Fatigue	Nightmares	Hyperactivity
Insomnia (which may turn to hypersomnia)	Underactivity	
Health problems (like digestive problems)	Startle reactions	
Exhaustion		

#### **COGNITIVE REACTIONS**

Difficulty with concentration  
Difficulty solving problems  
Flashbacks  
Isolation  
Inability to attach importance to anything else  
Memory disturbances

#### **EMOTIONAL REACTIONS**

Fear/Anxiety	Anger (which may be manifested in scape-goating, irritability, frustration with the “system,” or violent fantasies)
Guilt	
Emotional numbing	
Over-sensitivity	
Depression	
Feeling of helplessness	
Amnesia for the event	

## **COPING WITH CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS**

- Within the first 24-48 hours – Periods of strenuous physical exercise alternated with relaxation will alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- Structure your time – Keep busy.
- You are normal and having normal reactions – Don't label yourself crazy or weak.
- Talk to people – Talk is the most healing medicine.
- Be aware of numbing the pain with overuse of drugs or alcohol – You don't need to complicate this with a substance problem.
- Reach out – People do care.
- Keep your lives as normal as possible.
- Spend time with others.
- Help your co-workers as much as possible by sharing feelings and checking out how they are doing.
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share your feelings with others.
- Remember – You can stand your feelings and the intensity of the hurt will lessen.
- Keep a journal – Write your way through those sleepless hours.
- Do things that feel good to you.
- Realize those around you are also under stress.
- Do not make any big life changes during this stressful period.
- Do make as many daily decisions as possible, which will give you a feeling of control over your life, i.e., if others ask you what you want to eat – answer them even if you are not sure.

**Special recognition and thanks to the City of Los Angeles Department of Fire from whose program this material was excerpted.**

## **INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES ABOUT CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS**

### **WHAT IS A CRITICAL INCIDENT?**

Critical incidents commonly result from situations in which there is an imminent threat to life, either for the emergency worker or for the people they are duty bound to serve. These are incidents of extraordinary magnitude that possibly introduce exceptional physical and emotional turmoil. The department identifies certain incidents that may produce unusual duress. Typically, this would be a disaster caused by fire, airplane crash, building collapse, multiple fatalities, explosion, toxic contamination, death or injury of a co-worker, and the death or injury of children.

Incidents involving children often produce emotional, physical, and cognitive reactions. Incidents where co-workers are injured or killed may be the hardest of all for emergency responders.

### **WHAT REACTIONS DOES A CRITICAL INCIDENT PRODUCE?**

No two people react to disaster in the same way, but several patterns of behavior have been studied following critical incidents. Given the chaos or horror of a disaster, stress reaction stems from the resulting emotional pain. Emotional pain is as real as physical pain, and feeling this hurt is part of the recovery process.

Keep in mind two things: (1) any reactions are normal and (2) stress-related symptoms are transitory, and long-term detrimental effects are relatively rare.

Following is a list of some reactions to Critical Incident Stress:

- Anger – Both specifically about the incident and about life in general. There could be more than usual irritability at home and at work. However, if domestic violence results, this is not to be tolerated and needs immediate intervention.
- 
- Generally feeling depressed – A sense of loss; feelings of helplessness; crying for “no reason.”
- 
- Guilt – Because unable to save more lives in spite of their sophisticated skills, training, and their desire to rescue.
- 
- Sleep disturbances – Insomnia, nightmares, increased sleep time, lethargy, constant fatigue, restlessness, waking early, and sleep that is not giving them a feeling of rest. In fact, sleep disturbance is the one reaction that is most often reported following a critical incident.
-

- Brief flashbacks – A reliving of some aspects of the incident, frequently triggered by smells, sounds, tastes, and emotions. This worries emergency workers; they often wonder about having complete control of their thoughts.
- Mild confusion – Difficulty concentrating and attending to details, amnesia about parts of the incident, hearing, and speech difficulties.
- Increased startle response – Ever vigilant to the incident possibly occurring again, jumpy, senses may be acutely tuned to protect. This could include well-intentioned restrictions being imposed on loved ones to keep them safe.
- Physical changes – Nausea, diarrhea, loss or increase of appetite, muscle tremors, headaches, back and neck aches, indigestion, cold and flu symptoms, increased alcohol and tobacco use.
- Denial – Emergency workers may not always be aware of being affected by a critical incident. Some actually report and show no impact at all, this time. You might be more sensitive to a reaction than he/she is. Everyone clings to the concept of invulnerability, that “the next person needs the help.” You can see where this belief could be especially strong for rescuers. A variation of denial is to talk all about the other calls while saying that this one was really nothing. Regardless of the circumstances, you find, trust your instincts and encourage talk.
- Other manifestations – Lack of coordination, accident prone, and anxiety about returning to work, mood swings, and job dissatisfaction.

You know him/her better than they know anyone. If you see a marked change suddenly appear it is a clue that a critical incident stress reaction may have occurred. But keep in mind, these symptoms are a normal early response.

I can often tell when something unusual has happened. My loved one seems distant, withdrawn, and isolated. Is this normal? What can I do?

Nationally, nearly 60% of emergency personnel report that critical incidents impact their family life through arguments or withdrawal. It is suspected that this impact is probably closer to 100%. The gate between home and work swings both ways, and it just swung to your side.

Specialists in the field of critical incident psychology closely examine the phenomenon of isolation. A growing sense of is a common emotional sign of a delayed stress reaction. Sometimes these feelings of aloneness develop because of the responder’s self-doubt after a tough call.

Emergency workers are great for picking apart every action or decision and brutally putting themselves down for every possible mistake. Unfortunately, the gift of analysis may bring the curse of anger and rage. This irritability results in keeping people at a distance; therefore, if possible, family members should limit demands placed on the distressed rescue worker.

Isolation may be occurring at more levels than you see.

- There may be feelings of estrangement from colleagues who were not part of the incident – “they can’t understand what it was like.”
- Colleagues not part of the assignment may feel resentment at not getting into the incident while being left behind with the comparable drudgery of business as usual and an extra workload.
- Another consideration is that your loved one went through something without the family. The feeling may be that since you were not there, maybe you too cannot understand.
- There may be conflict and isolation with family members who are angry at the rescuer’s absence during the disaster. Especially if overtime or recall is involved. Sleep may now seem more important than family plans. Promises may be broken and routine work may pile up.
- In addition, your loved one may shift between a need to ventilate and an unwillingness to talk at all. The vacillation could be completely discordant with the wishes and readiness of the family.

Jeffery T. Mitchell, Ph.D., a noted trauma recovery specialist, finds that distressed workers tend to avoid contact with the people that love them most, and who might provide the best support. Do not be surprised if they refuse to discuss anything for a while. This is not just happening in your home; it is happening in many homes after the incident. It has nothing to do with anything you did. Do not blame yourself for his/her reaction.

One way to solve the isolation dilemma would be to have the emergency worker take a step back for a moment and see what is happening. Nevertheless, remember how powerful denial works? Realizing that he/she may be experiencing a delayed reaction gets your loved one on a new track, one using trusted friends and open communications. Good friends, family, clergy, and counselors may all be very helpful in restoring the balance of a distressed worker’s life by providing support and feedback.

A discussion of family communications would be incomplete without addressing the issue of sex. Occasionally, emergency workers experience a diminished sexual drive, or a decreased ability to perform sexually because of delayed stress reactions. They may also become more resistive to touching or being touched during a delayed stress reaction. Conversely, some may desire more affection. Sexuality could be an important love and life affirming statement. If decreased sexual intimacy is related to delayed stress, it is often transitory.

Let us conclude this topic with an observation and reaffirmation of your importance. Strong relationships with family, friends, and co-workers buffer distress and have a positive affect on both physical and mental health. Because of the many stresses and hazards inherent in their work, developing and maintaining good social support networks are very important for emergency workers.



### **LESSON III: GENDER DIFFERENCES IN COMMUNICATION**

- GOAL:** To heighten the participants' awareness of the differences in the ways some males and females communicate.
- OBJECTIVES:** Given information on the female and male rules of communication participants will list the rules of communication and apply them in role-plays.
- PURPOSE:** For a couple to have effective communication, each must have the necessary knowledge and skills. For a relationship to be successful, men and women should be aware of their differences and learn ways in which they can handle these in a constructive and comprehensible fashion.
- PRESENTATION:** Participants are requested to refer to their rules of communication handouts as the instructor lectures on the material. The instructor summarizes the rules and asks the participants how they can acknowledge this information and apply this to their daily lives.
- After completion of the introduction, participants are assigned a scenario and will participate as a couple. After each scenario, the group will discuss: the differences in communication; how the rules are applied; and how others might handle the situation differently.
- After every couple has had an opportunity to complete their role-play, the instructor will summarize and ask participants what rules of communication are most valuable and applicable, both personally and as a couple.
- METHODS:** Discussion role-plays
- MATERIALS:** Handouts on Female and Male Rules of Communication, index cards with scenarios stating specific roles for each person, overhead projector and overhead of Rules of Communication

## **FEMALE RULES OF COMMUNICATION**

1. Asking a question is a good way to show someone that you are interested in him or her.
2. Talking about problems can be a relief and sharing complaints is a way to be close and supportive.
3. Background details help someone understand a situation.
4. Discussing problems show that the person is important, even if the problem is not.
5. People feel comfortable expressing they think.
6. Acknowledging that someone is in a bad situation is a way to express sympathy and and be supportive.
7. Complaining that a relationship falls short of a romantic ideal is a way to let both partners share their disappointments and get closer.

## **MALE RULES OF COMMUNICATION**

1. Ask a question only when you want information.
2. Do not dwell on the negative. complaining never helped anyone.
3. Gets to the point; details are boring and often irrelevant.
4. There is no point in discussing a trivial problem; just make a decision and be done with it.
5. Say what you want directly. If you don't,
6. Pointing out that someone is in a bad situation is a form of putdown through pity.
7. Being unrealistic about relationships is a mistake, as is complaining about and blaming others for things that cannot be changed.

**SPECIAL RECOGNITION AND THANKS TO GARY SMALLEY FROM WHOSE PROGRAM THIS MATERIAL WAS EXCERPTED.**

## **LESSON IV: COMMUNICATION: THE FOUNDATION OF HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS**

- GOAL:** Couples will develop a greater understanding on nonverbal communication techniques and will feel more comfortable using these in their relationship.
- OBJECTIVE:** Following lecture and group activity, participants will list the Primary Methods of Body Language and describe the importance of each.
- PURPOSE:** Body language is more open to interpretation than oral language. Individuals often draw conclusions about others based upon perception of body language. Knowledge of body language will mitigate some misunderstanding and misinterpretation commonly inherent in familial relationships.
- PRESENTATION:** The basis of this lesson is the use of the audience's experience with active listening and interpretation of body language.
- The instructor gives each participant a copy of various nonverbal behaviors (see list). The audience divides into couples and has ten minutes to talk with each other about a recent concern in their relationship. They are to make note of the body language used during the conversation. After the allotted period, the group reconvenes and the instructor facilitates group discussion. Discussion will focus on the couple's interpretation of the body language used during the exercise. A lecture and discussion on the methods of nonverbal communication and the role interpretation will conclude this presentation.
- METHOD:** Lecture, discussion, question and answer
- MATERIALS:** Handouts on Nonverbal Behavior  
Handout on Primary Methods of Body Language  
Handout on Active Listening to Body Language

## NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR

**With your partner, discuss a recent concern in your relationship and pay close attention to the following nonverbal behaviors.**

1. Proximity to each other
2. Eye contact and Movement
3. Stance and Posture
4. Facial Expressions
5. Head Nodding
6. Position of Chin
7. Touch
8. Gestures
9. Body Lean

## **PRIMARY METHODS OF BODY LANGUAGE**

### **EYE CONTACT**

Eye contact is important because it provides us with feedback to the speaker. Eye contact informs the sender if the receiver is actively listening to the conversation.

### **FACIAL EXPRESSIONS**

Facial expressions are used in combination with speech to frame what is being said; thus, demonstrating humor, seriousness, empathy, etc...

### **HEAD NODS**

Head nods inform the speaker that one is listening. The nonverbal behavior encourages the continuation of conversation. Head position can be used to indicate attitudes and as a way of signaling someone to come or to pay attention.

### **GESTURES AND BODY MOVEMENTS**

Gestures are made with the hands, feet, and body. The hands make the most expressive body gestures. Gestures are often substituted for words and can signal a change in someone's speaking or listening role.

### **POSTURE AND STANCE**

Posture and stance convey attitudes such as friendliness, anger, frustration, hostility, acceptance, and suspicion. One's posture can show if they are interested, relaxed, anxious, and if they are open or closed to the discussion.

### **PROXIMITY**

Closeness or distance communicates how well an individual knows a person. Changes in proximity can express the desire to initiate or terminate a discussion.

## **PRIMARY METHODS OF BODY LANGUAGE (cont.)**

### **BODY CONTACT**

Touch is most common in greetings and farewells. Some people are comfortable with being touched while others are not.

### **APPEARANCE**

Appearance and physique are important factors in expressing information. Aspects like body build, height, attractiveness, can all be misinterpreted as a part of self-presentation. Appearance plays a part in the first impressions we have of others.

## ACTIVE LISTENING TO BODY LANGUAGE

1. How close were you standing/sitting to your partner?
2. Did the two of you make eye contact? When was there a shift in eye movement?
3. What posture did you assume during the conversation? Was your partner's posture open, closed, attentive?
4. Were your partner's gestures positive or negative? What is the reason for your conclusion?
5. Did your partner lean upright, forward, or backward during the conversation? When was there a shift in body position?
6. Were your partner's facial expressions supportive and did they display interest or disinterest? Give examples.

## **LESSON V: COMMUNICATION: SELF CONCEPT AND EXPRESSION OF FEELINGS**

- GOAL:** Participants will develop a greater understanding of the clear components of clear interpersonal communication and develop an appreciation of how others express thoughts and feelings.
- OBJECTIVE:** Given information on interpersonal communication, participants will identify and describe the components of effective communication.
- Following the exercise, participants will have a greater awareness of self-concept and how this concept influences communication.
- The instructor will have an awareness of each individual's self-concept and greater insight of how the individuals in the group express themselves.
- PURPOSE:** How people see themselves is the most important factor affecting communication. If one has a strong self-concept they are more willing to express their feelings, listen objectively, and accept constructive criticism. Knowledge of communication skills and self-awareness can enhance relationships, therefore, reducing distress.
- PRESENTATION:** Participants are asked to refer to their handout on effective communication. The instructor gives a brief summary of effective communication.
- The instructor passes out multiple colored candies to the audience. The instructor requests that the audience not eat the candies until after the exercise. Questions are asked that correspond to the color of the candy that each participant chose (see list).
- After each person has had an opportunity to discuss their self-concept, the instructor summarizes self-concept and how this affects self-expression.
- METHOD:** Discussion, Question and Answer
- MATERIALS:** Handouts on Effective Communication  
Multiple-colored candy such as Skittles



## **COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

### **SELF-CONCEPT**

The most important people in our lives create self-concept.

- \* Parents, caretakers, and other family members
- \* Teachers
- \* Friends, Peers, and Coworkers
- \* Supervisors

Individuals with strong concepts will:

- \* Express his/her feelings
- \* Accept constructive criticism
- \* Listens to others with an open mind

Individuals with weak self-concept will:

- \* Feel insecure when interacting with others
- \* Be guarded in communication
- \* Lack confidence when dealing with others
- \* Guard against self-disclosure

### **CLARITY OF EXPRESSION**

- \* Organize your thoughts and then your words.
- \* Simplify both words and ideas.
- \* Repeat key concepts.
- \* Focus on vital aspects of the message.

## **ANGER MANAGEMENT**

- \* Anger is a normal emotion and is neither good nor bad.
- \* Anger is often the result of a neutral external event perceived as threatening.
- \* Take responsibility for what you say and do.
- \* It is okay to be angry.
- \* Is anger appropriate to the situation?
- \* Talk about your anger with someone.
- \* Learn to re-channel the anger into something positive.
- \* Anger must be released; if repressed, anger can breed physical, emotional, and psychological stress reactions.

## **MANAGING OTHER'S ANGER**

- \* Allow ventilation of the anger.
- \* Give and request feedback.
- \* Keep calm and keep facial expressions sincere.
- \* Validate people's feelings of anger.
- \* Maintain composed demeanor.

## **SELF-DISCLOSURE**

- \* The ability to talk openly and truthfully about oneself.
- \* Important for building relationships.
- \* Judiciously builds trust.

**Special recognition to Mike Montoya from whose handout this material was excerpted.**

## VITA

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Cameron is married to Gary Brown a Fort Worth Fire Department Captain. They have one daughter Courtney who is a nursing student at Texas Christian University. Cameron has worked for the Fort Worth Fire Department for 25 years and now serves as both chaplain and firefighter. She has facilitated over 500 Critical Incident Stress Debriefings after events such as Oklahoma City Bombing, Branch Davidians Fire, New York City 9-11, Killeen Luby's Shootings, Hurricanes Andrew and Katrina, Wedgewood Baptist Church Shootings, Fort Worth Courthouse Shootings, Precious Faith Church Fire, and numerous airplane crashes and line-of-duty deaths.

This professional paper was typed by author.