

THE POLICE CHAPLAINCY PROGRAM

Assisting Others During A Time of Need



By Rick Parent, Delta Police Department

During the early morning hours, the life of a police officer was suddenly taken away when Officer Mark died in a motorcycle accident. It started off as a routine Friday night for Officer Mark and his colleagues, patrolling the streets and responding to calls. However, no one expected the series of events that would occur as Officer Mark pursued a motor vehicle on a winding stretch

of roadway at high speeds. As he rounded a curve in the roadway Officer Mark lost control of his motorcycle and went off the pavement, striking a concrete post resulting in his untimely death.

News of the unexpected incident was met with shock, disbelief and despair. These were only some of the emotions that were felt by tearful civilian and police personnel, upon learning of Mark's tragic death. For many, the only comfort in the officers passing was that he had died as he lived, making a positive difference for the community that he served – a safer, better place to live.

For those who were left to carry on in his place, the Chaplaincy Program served as a welcome means of support during a period of emotional turmoil. Even after coming to terms with the heart breaking realization that Officer Mark was gone forever, the Chaplaincy program continued to provide comfort to many individuals by serving as a visible anchor of spiritual guidance and understanding.

The law enforcement chaplain is a clergy person with special interest and training for providing pastoral care to all individuals within a police agency, regardless of race, national origin, creed or religion. These services are provided without any financial cost and without any degree of proselytizing. The chaplain is there to listen, empathize and to provide assistance when requested - to the police officers and their families, as well as civilian members of the police agency. The program serves to enhance the choice of services available to police personnel and is not intended to replace the psychological and counseling resources available.

The individuals selected as law enforcement chaplains are first and foremost a person of God, duly ordained and appointed as an approved and experienced denominational representative. In addition, these individuals will typically possess the following attributes:

- *An individual who is a well seasoned and respected individual in the ministry. Importantly, this person must be capable of understanding and working with the unique characteristics often found within police personnel.*

- *Be able and willing to respond to any and all types of situations where a chaplain's presence is needed, in a professional and flexible manner.*
- *Possess a God-like compassion and understanding for all individuals, easily relating to people.*
- *An individual who is tactful and considerate in approaching all people, regardless of their race, gender, creed or religion.*

A police chaplain's duties may include:

- *Assisting in making the notification to the family of police personnel who have been seriously injured or killed.*
- *Upon request, attending and participating in the funerals of active or retired members of the police agency.*
- *Visiting sick and injured personnel in the hospital or in their homes.*
- *Participating with in-service training for personnel in areas that include spirituality, ethics, stress management, pre-retirement and family issues. This may include the publication of a monthly news bulletin focusing upon spiritual care and other topical issues that can be distributed to both police and civilian personnel.*
- *Assisting the police agency in responding to major disasters, evacuations and other incidents where members of the community are traumatized or hurt.*
- *Providing liaison with other religious leaders within the community.*

The duties and responsibilities of a law enforcement chaplain may vary with each police agency but generally the role of the chaplain is to provide specialized guidance, counseling and assistance to personnel with the agency. The Police Chaplain is typically supported by a Police Chaplaincy Committee that meets regularly to assist the Chaplain with their duties. This assistance may take the form of visitations to police and civilian personnel that have suffered an injury or, who are off on sick leave for an extended period. The Police Chaplaincy Committee is comprised of dedicated police and civilian personnel and is often chaired by a member of the management team.

In summary, the police chaplain program serves as an important resource for the emotional, mental and spiritual burdens that law enforcement officers face in the line of duty as well as in their personal lives, away from the job. The Police Chaplaincy program can be a significant source of strength during a time of need. This is especially true for those police personnel who are suddenly and unexpectedly left to cope with the tragic death of a friend and a co-worker. By having this program in place, before the need arises, the police agency is better equipped to assist personnel by minimizing the impact of an event such as a line-of-duty-death.