

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

**Chaplain Corps:
Partners with Law Enforcement and the Community**

**An Administrative Research Paper
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ABSTRACT

Chaplain programs are relevant to contemporary law enforcement because citizens have many needs that fall outside of the normal scope of a law enforcement officer's assigned duties. Officers are traditionally trained to handle themselves when dealing with crime. However, they have limited skills and experience when it comes to assisting citizens with the emotional and spiritual needs that arise during times of crisis. The purpose of this research is to demonstrate that chaplains can bridge the gap between the community and law enforcement and meet the spiritual and emotional needs of both the community and law enforcement. Additionally, chaplains can partner with law enforcement to relieve them of the burden of meeting the emotional and spiritual needs of the victim and allow the officer to focus on their investigation. Furthermore, chaplains can be utilized to minister within the law enforcement community. Police officers typically work odd shifts and hours that conflict with their church attendance and time with their families. Chaplains can minister in ways that would provide the opportunity to receive a spiritual and an emotional outlet for officers and their families in times of need.

The researcher found (through a review of articles, internet sites, journals and surveys) data that supported the theory that law enforcement can benefit by a partnership with chaplains. Twenty-nine different agencies were surveyed and through the data obtained, it was discovered that chaplains can benefit both the officer and the community if utilized correctly. Also, if chaplains are able to gain the officer's trust and confidence, they can pass through the invisible barriers put in place by law

enforcement. This will provide the officer assistance in their personal and professional lives as well as in their relationship with the community.

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INTRODUCTION

Chaplains have been an important part of law enforcement for many years. They might not carry a weapon or patrol a beat; however, their role can be just as important to law enforcement and the community. The challenges of today's society are at times overwhelming to law enforcement. Communities are experiencing new and horrific tragedies everyday such as the shootings in our schools and multiple homicides in places we once thought were safe. The police officer is faced with these issues and is expected to maintain their composure, although it is recognized there is a need for some type of counseling or debriefing for them to overcome these incidents. This can be overwhelming to our departments and communities. Officers are trained on how to work a crime scene or conduct an investigation, but when the emotional stress becomes too great there is a tendency to avoid it because they are not equipped to handle it. This places a huge burden on law enforcement to provide the support needed for them to heal. This research will examine the issue of whether or not a partnership with Chaplain Corps will benefit law enforcement and the community.

Chaplains can be lay-ministers or clergy from different faiths and religious backgrounds. Their role is to support law enforcement and the needs of the community in times of crisis or tragedy. They are equipped to handle these issues and can be relied upon when called. They provide emotional and spiritual support for the community and law enforcement. This provides law enforcement freedom to complete their investigation and gives the reassurance that the needs of the victim are being addressed.

The purpose of this research is to address the need for a partnership between the Chaplain Corps, law enforcement and the community. There is a basic need for chaplains to be involved with law enforcement in order to meet the needs of the community and its officers. This research will show that chaplains have been utilized in many ways and have consistently been a positive influence with law enforcement and the community. When utilized correctly, these groups can partner together to bring healing emotionally and spiritually to both the community and law enforcement.

The research examines the question, "Can law enforcement and the community benefit by a partnership with chaplains?" Research will examine the role of chaplains in other departments by conducting surveys and interviews to show how they are utilized, as well as research found in reviews of articles and internet sites. The purpose of chaplains in other departments will be determined through surveys and interviews. Ideally, this research will provide conclusive evidence that chaplains are important to law enforcement and the community.

The anticipated finding of the research paper will show that chaplains are an instrumental part of law enforcement and the community. Chaplains provide a service that is unique and personal. They add another dimension to law enforcement that addresses the spiritual welfare of the community. Chaplains can be used more efficiently if their roles in law enforcement and the community are recognized and valued. If used correctly chaplain programs can enhance the relationship between law enforcement and the community. The field of law enforcement will benefit from the research or be influenced by the conclusions because agencies will recognize and value the role of chaplains in law enforcement and be motivated to organize their own

chaplain's program, molded to fit their department and address the needs of their community.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A survey was conducted of 29 different law enforcement agencies focusing on the question, "Do you personally believe Chaplains are needed in law enforcement?" (Appendix) The majority of the respondents affirmed the importance of chaplains in law enforcement. When asked to give the reason they believe that chaplains are needed, they responded with the following things a chaplain could offer law enforcement. For instance, respondents reported: that chaplains could assist with moral and spiritual needs, chaplains are trustworthy and would hold private information in confidence, they could give support to victims, they could give support to personnel, they could provide guidance and counseling, they could mitigate the pressures of trauma, stress and emotions related to a critical incident, they could assist with death notification, they could assist with inmate needs, and offer invocations at ceremonies.

The participants were also asked if their chaplains are involved with their department and community and would they like to see them utilized more. Most responded that their agency either did not have a chaplain or did not know of his involvement with the department or community. All of the respondents did agree for the most part, that they would like to have chaplains or more of them and would like to see them be more involved with their lives and the lives of those in the community. Again, they stressed the need for spiritual and moral guidance, counseling for their personal and family needs, assisting officers with debriefing in emotional, stressful and traumatic incidents and support for victims.

Research has shown that chaplains in law enforcement can meet the needs of officers and the community. Police officers have needs outside of law enforcement that only those with a view inside can understand (House, 2007). Chaplains can be utilized to minister within the law enforcement community. Police officers typically work odd shifts and hours that conflict with their family and church attendance. Chaplains can minister in ways that would provide the opportunity to receive a spiritual and an emotional outlet for officers and their families in times of need. Chaplains are not there to grow churches or to be a jail ministry, but to simply be available for officers and their families (House, 2007).

There is no other profession that is faced with more situations that discourage and cause emotional, mental and spiritual burdens than those who work in law enforcement (Coleman, 2007). Statistics show that the long term effects of working odd hours and different schedules with potential dangerous encounters and constant exposure to negative behavior can result in increased suicide and divorce rates. The nationwide suicide rate is 12 per 100,000 people. The suicide rate for law enforcement is 22 per 100,000 persons (Coleman, 2007). The national divorce rate is 49.5 per 100,000 people (divorcereform.org, 2004). According to Coleman (2007), 67% of all law enforcement will go through a divorce.

The value of a chaplain corps program lies within the hearts of the officers who are willing to use it (East Lansing, 1999). Police officers inhabit a world that is not easily understood by those that are on the outside (Lawson, 2007). Lowell Lawson describes this invisible psychological barrier as the Blue Wall (pg 1). There is a way to penetrate it. Officers are more likely to respond to a police chaplain that has developed

a relationship with them, rather than seek out a mental health practitioner that they do not know and do not trust (East Lansing, 1999). A chaplain's ministry is at its most effective when he is slow to offer advice and quick to simply listen. A chaplain must have a clear sense of his calling and be willing to make the commitment to spend time with the officers to establish his role as a chaplain. He must become a familiar face, visiting officers frequently and spend time in their world of law enforcement. A chaplain can breach the Blue Wall by: assuming responsibility for building relationships, initiate conversations, speak a good word and be positive, be a good listener/know what is happening in the officer's lives, remember special occasions, and visiting the sick and injured officers and their families. If a chaplain can demonstrate genuine concern and sensitivity in all of these areas, he has no need to worry about gaining acceptance or penetrating the Blue Wall. The word will pass from officer to officer that the chaplain is accepted and has become a part of this unique family.

A chaplain is a licensed or ordained minister called not only to serve his own congregation, but the community as a whole. The chaplain is a liaison to the community and adds another dimension to law enforcement. They must be willing to serve the community through direct contact with families and persons. Chaplains do death notifications. They provide counseling on family violence calls. They get involved in cases of sexual assault, missing children, kidnappings and other traumatic incidents. They are called upon in times of natural disasters. They also attend almost every death scene that law enforcement is called to. Suicide prevention and intervention are other situations they can be called in to assist with (Fair, 2005). Chaplains provide follow-up with victims after the police presence has left. They continue to offer counsel and

console those that have experienced a traumatic event. This provides law enforcement the freedom to complete their investigation and gives the assurance that the needs of the victim are being addressed. According to Dr. Dave Fair, “the primary job of a police chaplain, in a nut shell, is to provide psychological first aid” (pg. 6 of 195).

Today’s chaplains should be educated and trained religious coordinators who are professionals. They must have strong administrative and counseling skills that enable them to develop and initiate religious programs that are personal in function and spiritual in nature (Fewell, 1995). There is a credentials program offered to chaplains through the International Conference of Police Chaplains (“ICPC”). The ICPC offers four levels of training; from Basic level to Diplomat and Fellow levels. This credentialing program gives chaplains an opportunity to document their education in this specialized ministry (icpc4cops.org). The core courses provide chaplains with the knowledge and hands-on training that enable them to be effective in their chosen profession. The Basic Level core courses include training in stress management, responding to a crisis situation, death notification, post traumatic stress syndrome, substance abuse, suicide, and sensitivity and diversity. Other Basic Level core courses address issues particularly related to the officers such as burn out for officers, legal liability and confidentiality, ethics, the law enforcement family and officer injury and death.

Chaplain credentialing or accreditation programs not only provide the training a chaplain needs, but also provides the credibility their profession requires. Credentialed training raises the value of the individual law enforcement chaplain as well as the value of the chaplains program. Through their training, credentialed chaplains are well

qualified to meet the needs of stressed, burdened and traumatized law enforcement and citizens.

METHODOLOGY

The research question to be examined considers whether or not law enforcement and the community can benefit by a partnership with chaplains. The researcher believes chaplains and law enforcement can successfully partner together to provide spiritual and psychological support to law enforcement and the community. The research will show the value and necessity of this partnership. The method of inquiry will include a review of pertinent articles, periodicals, internet sites and a chaplaincy training manual. All of which will show the value of chaplain corps, that the majority of law enforcement desires to see chaplains utilized more and that chaplains do meet the needs of officers and the community.

A survey of various Texas law enforcement agencies will be submitted posing questions regarding the current existence of chaplain corps, the size, denomination and scope of responsibility, level of involvement within the agency and community and lastly the need to further utilize chaplains. The instrument that will be used to measure the researcher's findings regarding the subject of the need for chaplaincy in law enforcement will include a survey. This survey will be used as a tool to gather data that will give evidence to and support this researcher's hypothesis. The size of the survey will consist of seven main questions with sub-questions, distributed to representatives of 29 different law enforcement agencies. Participants will be administrative officers from the rank of Sergeant to Chief. They will be representatives from cities, counties, a hospital district and a college district within the State of Texas.

Out of 29 agencies surveyed 29 responded resulting in a response rate of 100%. The information obtained from the survey will be analyzed by determining how many agencies have chaplains or chaplain programs and how many do not. All of the participants will be asked the question “Would you like to see the Chaplains utilized more in your department?” “Why?” and “Do you personally believe Chaplains are needed in law enforcement?” They will also be asked to give a reason for their opinion. The officer’s input will be compared and similar responses will be grouped and input into a graph showing the need and value of chaplains in law enforcement.

FINDINGS

This research was conducted to answer the question, “Can law enforcement and the community benefit by a partnership with chaplains?” A survey was submitted to 29 different law enforcement agencies within the State of Texas to gather data to either support or disprove this question. If the officers themselves did not see the need or benefit in having chaplains in law enforcement and the community, there was no further need to continue exploration of this question. The researcher felt strongly that there would be supporting data to show that most agencies already considered chaplains to be an integral part of their department. Also if given the opportunity, most would like to see the chaplains become more involved.

First the representatives were asked if their agencies have chaplains. Eighteen out of twenty-nine responded that they did have chaplains actively involved with their department. Eleven responded that they did not have any chaplains. Then the research revealed that out of the agencies that responded yes, ten agencies had an organized chaplain corps with at least two or more chaplains (see Figure 1). Eight responded that

they did not have an organized corps, but had at least one chaplain meeting the needs of their agency. Again, eleven responded that they did not have any type of chaplain assistance within their agency.

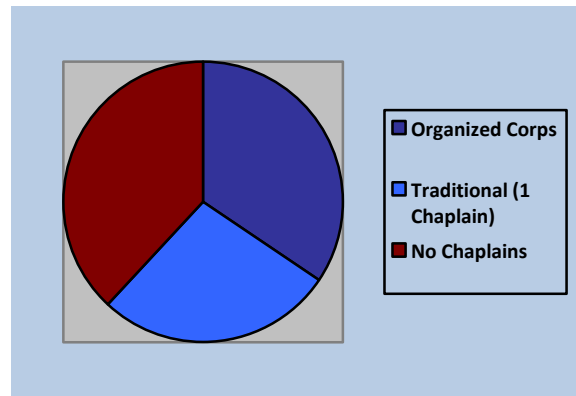


Figure 1. Breakdown of Chaplains in Surveyed Agencies

Another question was asked about the current involvement of the chaplains and the types of responsibilities they perform. The majority responded that their chaplains are most involved in officer/employee counseling. The second responsibility performed was both critical incident response/debriefing and ceremonial functions such as invocations, funerals, weddings and community events. Next, they responded that their chaplains were involved in meeting inmate needs and death notifications. Lastly, they responded that the chaplains participate in ride-alongs and support the officer's family needs. Only one agency did not respond to this question (see Figure 2).

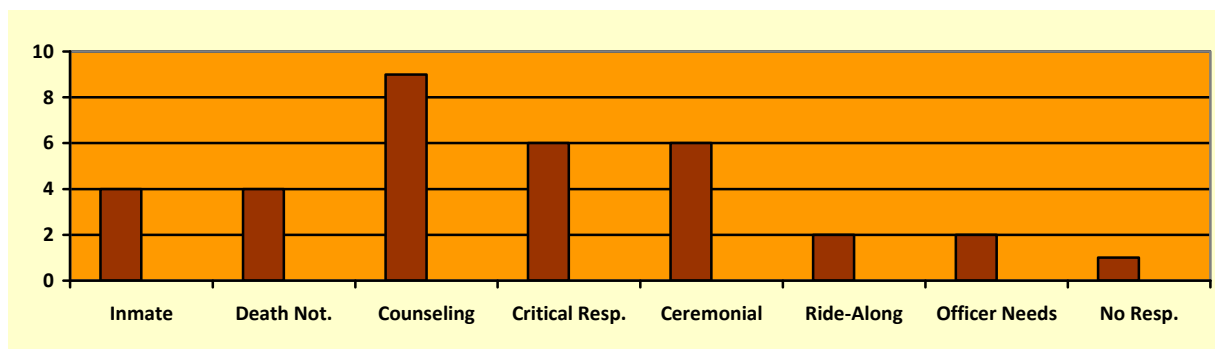


Figure 2. Current Chaplain Involvement

Additionally, the survey asked if the respondents would like to see chaplains utilized more within their agency. The researcher was interested to discover if the “Blue Wall” factor would come into play. Would the officers’ responses show that they were willing to allow the chaplains more access to their world or would they be of the opinion that chaplain’s role was utilized sufficiently? Surprisingly, out of twenty-nine responses, the majority (13) responded that they would like to see chaplains utilized more. Ten responded that they were unsure if they wanted to see more involvement. Six stated that they did not want to see more involvement in their department. They went on to clarify that they felt their chaplain’s current level of involvement was sufficient.

The final questions were asked, “Do you personally believe Chaplains are needed in law enforcement?” and “Why?” Overwhelmingly, the response was yes. Twenty-six out of twenty-nine believed in the need of chaplains in law enforcement. Two responded that they were unsure of the need. Only one responded that there was no need for chaplains in law enforcement (see Figure 3).

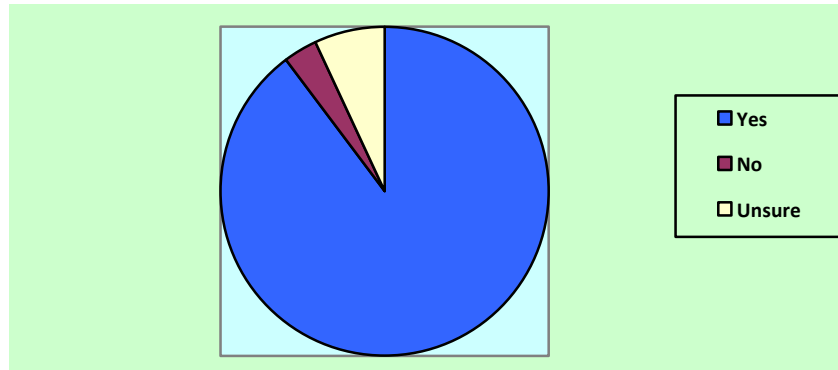


Figure 3. Necessity of Chaplains

Finally the respondents were asked to give recommendations on how they would like to see chaplains better utilized in their agencies. The data gathered supports the original research question, “Can law enforcement and the community benefit by a partnership with chaplains?” Thirteen out of 29 agencies wanted to see more involvement of chaplains in meeting officer needs. They stated concerns such as stress, need for counseling, comfort in times of crisis and assistance with the officer’s family issues. Next they stated the need for spiritual counseling. Following was the need for more chaplain involvement with the community in assisting citizens in their time of crisis. The respondents also wanted to see chaplains take a greater role in death notification and providing a positive role model for the department. Four agencies responded that they did believe that chaplains are needed in law enforcement, but were unsure how they wanted to see that increased involvement (see Figure 4).

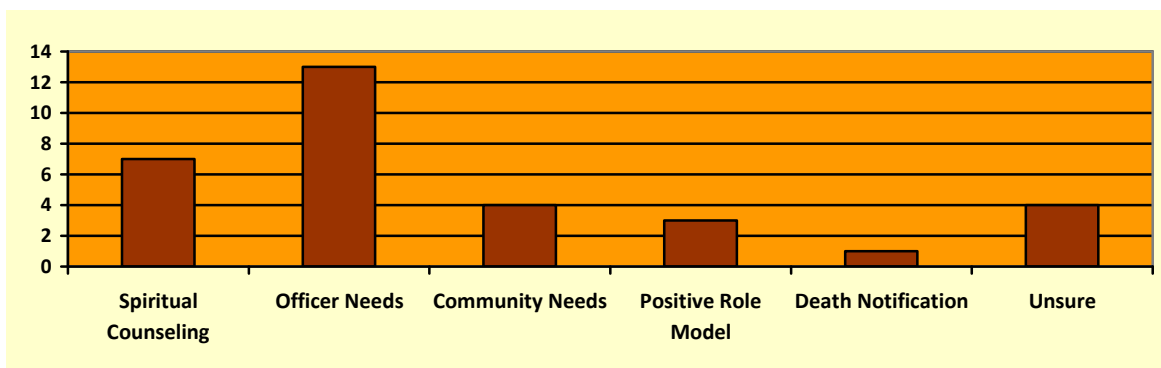


Figure 4. Desired Chaplain Involvement

It was interesting to note that although the majority of officers responded yes to more involvement, they were specific to say what they did not want to see in chaplain ministry. They did not want preaching or “bible thumping” in their department or with citizens. They did not want chaplains engaged in growing their own church or pushing their beliefs upon them. They only wanted chaplain involvement when their services were needed. The researcher gathered from the data that most of the respondents felt that chaplain ministry when utilized correctly can be a benefit, especially if the chaplains are participating for the right reason.

CONCLUSION

The question examined by the researcher was, “Can law enforcement and the community benefit by a partnership with chaplains?” The purpose of this research was to discover if law enforcement believed as this researcher did, that chaplains were of benefit, were needed and their involvement wanted in law enforcement and in the community. The research question that was examined focused on finding data on how many agencies actually had a chaplain or organized program. Then the research further explored how the chaplains were currently utilized in their agencies and the community. Finally, the research question examined whether or not the respondents

believed there was a need for chaplains and if so, how they wanted to see more involvement. It was anticipated that the research would prove that there is a definite benefit in having a partnership between chaplains and law enforcement. If utilized correctly, a chaplain program would not only benefit the officer but the community as well.

The findings of this research completely supported the researcher's belief in the need for this partnership. Almost 100% of the responses were affirmative in their recognition of the value of a chaplains program. The data collected proved that officers were focused on their need of chaplain ministry more than the need of chaplains in the community. This was not to say that they were not concerned about the community. They expressed the desire to see chaplains utilized more in the community especially in times of crisis. The data showed that they were aware of their own need due to the stress and demands of the job.

There were a few limitations that might have hindered the further exploration of this study. The researcher discovered that there is very little information available regarding chaplains in law enforcement. There is much information regarding chaplains as they relate to the military and in the use of chaplains in the medical field. Chaplains in law enforcement appear to be a relatively new concept. Another hindrance to the study of this research question is the "blue wall" factor which makes it difficult for officers to allow anyone to penetrate their world. They are suspicious of those who do not understand the problems they face and the stresses of their jobs. Therefore they are reluctant to express their opinion or to give insight into their needs.

The study of chaplains in law enforcement and the community is relevant to law enforcement because the research shows that due to the demands of the profession and effects of crime on the community, that chaplains definitely bring an element of hope, spiritual guidance and comfort. The chaplain program needs to be expanded not only to the citizens but also to the officers. The problem most agencies face is that they either do not have or have a limited use of the chaplains program. With the problems and stress that confront all officers, it makes it important for officers to have access to someone who can help them. The chaplains can become a trusted confidant that officers can turn to in times of need.

When the officers and agencies feel comfortable with their chaplains program they will use them more when dealing with traumatic issues concerning the citizens. The citizens can benefit tremendously from this partnership by giving them access to counseling, support and consolation in their times of need. When citizens deal with these kinds of traumatic issues they need immediate help and do not have the time or resources to find it. That is where the chaplain steps in to give immediate assistance during those first crucial minutes and hours. By being there it not only helps the citizen to get through the ordeal, but it also relieves law enforcement of the burden of providing the spiritual and emotional support that the citizen requires. The officer can then concentrate on completing their investigation into the criminal aspect of the incident. Most officers do not have the skills or knowledge to deal with these types of issues. In fact, they are dealing with their own stress and hurt during those types of incidents.

The chaplain's focus should be turned upon the officer after the chaplain's role of providing support and consolation to the victims is finished and the officer completes his

investigation. This is when the officer needs to be debriefed due to the emotional stress they have experienced during the ordeal. If the officer does not receive debriefing, many times they will carry the stress with them which continues to build up until finally they release it. If not properly addressed, this can cause serious problems for the officer in the area of family issues or can cause other types of problems to manifest. This can lead to dependency on alcohol or drugs and can lead to divorce or even suicide. The existence of chaplains cuts across belief barriers at scenes of tragedy and provides necessary comfort to everyone involved. Law enforcement needs a spiritual advisor that they can trust and confide in that understands their life and helps them cope with the demands of their profession.

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APPENDIX

Please remit survey to:
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LEMIT/Leadership Command College
Chaplain Survey

Your Agency_____

1. Does your agency currently have Chaplains?
2. If you answered yes, how many Chaplains do you have and do they have a coordinator?

Name and phone number_____

3. Are the Chaplains composed of various denominational backgrounds?

4. What are the responsibilities of the Chaplains?

5. Are your Chaplains involved with your department and the community?

How?

6. Would you like to see the Chaplains utilized more in your department?

How?

7. Do you personally believe Chaplains are needed in law enforcement?

Why?