

Providing Officers Support through Police Chaplains

A police chaplain provides emotional, moral, and spiritual support to officers, staff, and their families. They can be paid employees of the agency or volunteers. Although police chaplains may be of one denomination or religion, they provide support to all officers, even if that means locating resources for individuals who do not share the same belief system. A strong chaplaincy program can support a culture where officers feel comfortable seeking help and finding support.

Police chaplains provide confidential support in several key areas of law enforcement and the communities they serve. These areas include but are not limited to officer wellness and support, spiritual support, and community-police engagement. Additionally, chaplains provide counseling and referrals to mental health services or other faith leaders for officers in need of help and confidentiality.

Police chaplains take an oath; However, their commitment is specific only to duties of a chaplain based on agency policy and does not include similar law enforcement authority. Chaplains are bound by the same ethics as officers, as well as by departmental policies and procedures.

Officer Wellness and Support. Chaplains can offer support for various officer safety and wellness services within an agency.

- **OFFICER DEATHS.** In the event of an officer death, chaplains have a variety of responsibilities. They serve as a resource for the agency's administration, the fallen officer's family, and the department's sworn and civilian personnel.

- **CRISIS AND CRITICAL INCIDENT ASSISTANCE.**

When an officer is in crisis, chaplains can apply their training in emotional and stress management, adversity, and spirituality to assist. Chaplaincy programs can also serve as support systems for officers following critical incidents and other traumatic events on- or off-duty.

- **OFFICER WELL-BEING.** Chaplains provide spiritual and psychological hope and moral support. They can serve as trusted resources with whom officers and their family members can talk through issues and concerns.

Providing Spiritual Support. Spiritual support can include non-religious forms of support, as well as support incorporating religious tenets if requested by the person receiving services. Pastoral care consists of helping acts, carried out by a spokesperson, intended for healing, sustaining, guiding, reconciling, and nurturing persons. Like doctors and lawyers, chaplains hold a legal confidentiality privilege which cultivates a space for officers to seek assistance with personal and professional issues.

Community-Police Engagement. Police chaplains can assist in fostering relationships between police officers and the public by facilitating partnerships between the department and various community stakeholders. Officers may also utilize chaplains to assist community members with critical incidents in the community such as suicides, severe traffic incidents, and other traumatic events.

The Role of Police Chaplains Within an Agency

Police chaplains provide a variety of supports for police agencies, officers, and law enforcement families. These supports can vary from agency to agency. As such, police chaplains can have a range of responsibilities, including:

- **IDENTIFYING** resources to help officers manage stress or address vicarious trauma by providing methods of incorporating wellness and spirituality into their daily routines.
- **VISITING** officers when hurt in the line of duty or seriously ill.
- **ASSISTING** officers in delivering death notifications to officer families, the public, and members of the department.
- **REPRESENTING** the agency in funerals, memorial services, and other religious and civic ceremonies.
- **ACCOMPANYING** officers to serve as a supportive presence during community events or gatherings and patrol shifts.
- **ACTING** as a liaison with local faith-based organizations to help foster community-police engagement.
- **FOSTERING** a culture that welcomes spirituality as a coping mechanism.

Integrating Chaplains into Agency Culture

Chaplains can be an important part of an agency's internal officer safety and wellness efforts and external community engagement, but it is important that chaplains have an understanding of the department and their role. Consider the following strategies to help chaplains build trust and learn about agency operations:

- **PROVIDE** an orientation for the chaplain about his or her role, responsibilities, and limitations.
- **ENCOURAGE** chaplains to attend citizens police academies.
- **INFORM** chaplains about Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), peer support, and other mental health resources.
- **INCLUDE** chaplains in officer safety and wellness trainings and events.
- **DEVELOP** an integrated, convenient chaplain outreach program that includes video/phone calls, text, and email.
- **HOST** an open office hour with the chaplain where officers and staff can drop in to talk.
- **INVITE** chaplains on ride-alongs and to roll calls with officers.
- **INVITE** chaplains to community events, academy graduations, law enforcement family events, and promotional and award ceremonies.

Additional Resources

For more information on police chaplaincy programs, contact the [International Association Chiefs of Police, Police Chaplain Section](#). For additional resources, visit the IACP Officer Safety and Wellness page www.theiacp.org/OSW and the IACP Community Police Engagement page <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/document/community-police-engagement>.

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For more officer wellness resources visit: www.theIACP.org/OSW

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