

# The Fire Chaplaincy

By Fire Chaplain Ken Rice, Colorado Fire Chaplains Association (CFCA)

970-262-9212

Cell: 970-418-0724

kenrice@hotmail.com

While chaplaincy in the fire service can be beneficial, it is often misunderstood and thus neglected or avoided. I would like for chiefs and their departments to at least have an appropriate understanding of what the fire chaplaincy really is and what the benefits can be to a department and to those they serve. A big misconception is that a chaplain is one who pushes religion and therefore should not be a part of a governmental agency—the “separation of church and state” thing.

A distinction should be made between a chaplain and a pastor. (Some are able fill both roles well.) A **pastor** works for a church and promotes the church’s religion. A **chaplain** works in the secular world including military, law, fire, hospitals, corporations, and so on, *with religion being secondary*. While a chaplain should not push religion, if someone else initiates a conversation regarding it, the chaplain should feel free to jump in.

How does the “separation of church and state” allow federal, state, and local governments to have chaplains? Simple: under common law, as long as there is an overall primary secular purpose, there may be religious benefits to the program without violating the constitution.

What chaplains can provide to firefighters and victims include help with stress management caused by critical incidents and personal problems, death notifications, grief support, counsel, empathy, encouragement, and officiating at weddings and funerals. *If requested*, a chaplain can offer prayer and spiritual support. When firefighters leave a death scene and their chaplain remains with a grieving family, it bodes well for the department. It is a ministry of presence, a service to the community, and it is appreciated.

Are you prepared for an overwhelming event such as a line of duty death, a firefighter unable to function adequately due to severe marital or family problems, or a shift that really needs some encouragement? Or what about the firefighter that needs someone he or she could talk to in total confidence? The list could go on and on. The bottom line is that a chaplain could be a significant resource for your department and the community you serve. Most fire chaplains are volunteers and hardly affect your budget.

If you would like more information on setting up a chaplain program for your department, I or another member of the CFCA will be glad to help and answer questions. My contact information is at the top of this page.