

A Fire Chaplain in My Department – Why?

Chaplain Jim Burns

Many fire chiefs ask the question above. Why do I need a fire chaplain in my department? I can call another department who has one, if I have a need and I can have my pastor come by and pray for our department functions.

However, a fire chaplain is not just to pray for the annual meeting or the Christmas party. A properly trained and certified fire chaplain is responsible for the spiritual, emotional and physical wellbeing of the members of your department and minister to crisis victims on your emergency scenes. They are there to visit ill and injured firefighters; to listen in confidence. A department needs to have that listening ear regardless of department size, career, combination or volunteer. Chaplains are valuable to your department if you have 15 volunteers or 50 to 100 combination/career departments.

The Louisiana Fire Chaplaincy goal is to have a chaplain in every department in every parish of our state. We follow the standard of care and standard of training of the international Federation of Fire Chaplains. The basic curriculum is the Essentials of Fire Chaplaincy, a 16 hour basic, fundamental component of training upon which all other fire chaplain training is built. We encourage our chaplains to pursue the Advanced Certificate (130+ hours) with many subjects- crisis intervention and grief specialties that are valuable to the emergency service chaplaincy.

A fire chaplain has specialized training that one does not get in theological seminaries or religious schools. In fact, many of our fire chaplains are lay people. A fire chaplain is not a preacher or evangelist; he/she is to be there, listen and love; there to function in line of duty deaths, to listen to firefighters when the stresses of emergency service pushes us beyond our coping. The fire chaplain is there to assist the fire chief and administrators with employee assistance programs, to make appropriate referrals, to bring in trained professionals to work with the department in times of devastated major critical incidents. The fire chaplain is trained to provide one-on-one support to one struggling with the demands of the job.

The fire chaplain does these services with no regard to denomination or faith or no faith at all. Fire chaplains are non-denominational, non-sectarian servants of the fire service. We are first, last and always servants. The fire chaplain is there to build a spiritual bridge in times of crisis.

An Active Chaplain member of the LFCN requires the chaplain be **appointed** by his/her fire chief, **endorsed** by his/her religious affiliation, to complete the **Essentials of Fire Chaplaincy** class, complete the **CISM Group Intervention / Individual Crisis Intervention** class, **NIMS** and do training and continuing education classes like a firefighter does.

If you are interested in starting a chaplaincy program in your department, have your chaplain become a trained certified fire chaplain, or you need more information or questions about the fire service chaplaincy, please see our website: www.LouisianaFireChaplains.com or contact: chaplainjim413@gmail.com or call me at 318-419-7278. Be safe out there, and God bless.