

## What You Should Expect From A Chaplain

by Chaplain David DeRevere



Chaplains serving law enforcement come in all sizes, shapes, ages and religious persuasions. Most are male, but some are female. No matter, for there are common traits that should be shared by all.

Some of these common traits are listed below and explained.

### Acceptance

A police chaplain cares about all members of a department because they are people. Members don't have to fit any particular mold or measure up to any special standard to be important.

They don't even have to go to a church or to a synagogue. They don't have to know the Bible. A chaplain accepts them as they are, just because they are one of God's children.

A chaplain doesn't have to agree with or condone whatever an officer does or says, he accepts a person without judgment for they are an important being.

### Availability

A chaplain should be willing to come whenever he is needed—this includes getting out of bed in the middle of the night. Chaplains are committed to responding when needed. Of course there will be times when a chaplain cannot respond immediately, but the complaint most often heard from chaplains is that the department doesn't call them enough.

If someone needs to talk personally with a chaplain, they should be able to get a prompt response. However, don't expect the chaplain to be a mind-reader. He may not realize that when you propose, "why don't you ride with me sometime, chaplain," that what you really want is to talk with him privately. Expect a quick response, however, when you say, "I've got something I would like to talk about with you."

### Confidentiality

An absolute must for chaplains is to keep what is told to them confidential.

A person must be able to discuss almost anything with a chaplain and know that it will never go any further.

The only exception is when there is a threat of danger; to either the person being counseled or someone else. A chaplain should make these ground rules known in advance.

Officers are a suspicious group but charges that a chaplain is a snitch for the chief are rarely true. An officer who makes a claim that he told something to the chaplain and now everyone knows about it, usually has overlooked the three or four other officers he also told.

### Credibility

A chaplain must have integrity. A department can expect correct ethical behavior from their chaplain. They can expect a chaplain to stand up for what is right and just, even when it pertains to prisoners.

Members of a department should be able to count on the chaplain to do what he says he will do. A chaplain's actions should square with his words. He should not only talk a good game, but live one.

### Faith

A chaplain must be a person of faith. This does not mean that a chaplain will always be preaching or quoting the Bible, but it does mean that his belief shines through in the kind of life that he lives and the things he says.

### Interest In You

A chaplain is genuinely interested in all the members of a department and their families. What they and their families do, and their successes or failures are important to the chaplain. He will be pleased to share both the joys and sorrows of their lives.

### Law Enforcement Knowledge

A chaplain should know what the world of a police officer is like. He should understand the pressures and keep abreast

of the developments impacting on such a life. If the chaplain is new, it will take time for him to learn this.

A good chaplain strives to be conversant with everything pertaining to law enforcement—from use of deadly force policies, to union negotiations. He will recognize this is a different world.

A chaplain will not "play cop," for he does not function as a sworn peace officer. While many chaplains feel it is an obligation on their part to be able to defend themselves and not be a liability if they are riding with someone, their function is not to be another officer.

These are some of the basic ingredients of a chaplain. Most chaplains have them, but chaplains do have faults and some will make mistakes. After all, they are human too. L&O

Chaplain David DeRevere is Executive Secretary of the International Conference of Police Chaplains. He was a volunteer chaplain for 19 years.

Information on how to select a chaplain or how to begin a chaplain program can be obtained free from the International Conference of Police Chaplains, Route Five -- Box 310, Livingston, TX 77351 (409) 327-2332. The ICPC also provides training for law enforcement chaplains.