

Grounded in Prayer

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN EMERGENCY SERVICES CHAPLAIN



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Variety and unpredictability characterize the ministry of an emergency services chaplain. When the call goes out for emergency responders, the scene that awaits might be as routine as a quickly treatable medical situation or as dramatic as a deadly motor-vehicle crash.

I didn't know which scene awaited me when I woke at 6 a.m. to the call, "Attention Fairfield first responders, medical assistance needed! Respond to

3436 14th Avenue for a 63-year-old, unresponsive female." While pulling out of the driveway, I announced over the radio, "Car 40 en route to 14th Avenue." On my way to the scene, I prayed for wisdom and for those involved.

When I arrived, responders were already beginning CPR. One looked up and said, "Chaplain, can you get an arrival time for the ambulance?" Over my handheld radio I said, "Fairfield Car 40 to Cox Ambulance 793. What is

your ETA?" They reported that they would be on scene in three minutes.

"Chaplain, we need to hook up the defibrillator. Can you take over compressions?" I knelt beside the woman's lifeless body, and my CPR training kicked in. With every compression, I prayed. "Lord, give this woman the will to live. Help her in Jesus' name."

When the ambulance arrived, I was free to minister to the family. "Mr. Roberts, we are doing all we can to help your wife," I reassured him. His grown daughter ran to his side. "Daddy, what happened?" "I think Mom had a heart attack!" he told her. "This is the chaplain." "Would you like me to pray with you?" I asked. As we began to pray, the peace of God seemed to descend over us.

After a period of intense effort by the crew, a nod from a paramedic told me that Mrs. Roberts had not survived. I looked directly at her husband and daughter. "I'm so sorry. They've done all they can. Mrs. Roberts is dead."

Again I prayed with the grieving family, asking God to help them in their loss. I contacted a funeral home and stayed with the Roberts family until their wife and mother was taken away. They told me how much they appreciated my help. After one last hug and a final prayer, I left.

With a deep sigh, I reported, "Car 40 clear of the scene on 14th Avenue. Back in service."

Note: Names and places have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

I decided to stop by the fire station before going home. Helping the two medical responders from that incident wash the rescue truck gave me a chance to talk with them. One responder asked, “Chaplain, can I talk to you a minute?” In private he confessed, “I forgot to put in an oralpharyngeal airway. I think I may have killed her!” As an Emergency Medical Technician myself, I was able to reassure him that the patient had been getting enough air. He had not killed her. We visited for a while and prayed together.

The 911 center is across the street from the fire station, and from time to time I hang out there with the dispatchers. So I walked in and sat with the two on duty. “What happened with that unresponsive female?” one asked. “The husband was so upset, we could barely understand him. We weren’t sure the information we gave you was correct!” I reassured them that they had done a great job, and the information was adequate. Even

though the patient did not survive, they, along with the rest of us, had done all we could.

While I was still with dispatchers, another call came through—a motor-vehicle crash. Two teenagers had been racing, and one of them broadsided a minivan. The three young children inside were uninjured, but the parents were trapped in the vehicle. I immediately went to the fire station and rode to the scene in the responding engine. I knelt with the children and comforted them while firefighters used the Jaws of Life to extricate the parents. In a brief time the family was reunited. Amazingly, none required hospital care. I offered a prayer of thanksgiving with them, then reassured the teenaged driver at fault that the family was alright.

I arrived back home about 9:30 a.m. “How did it go?” my wife asked. I briefly recounted the morning’s events. “I’m proud of you,” she replied. “I was praying. I hope you get some time to relax, but don’t forget, you have a

funeral at one this afternoon. I’ll make sure your uniform is clean.”

Whatever ministry is required in a crisis, prayer makes it effective. Prayer—as I rise for a midnight call, that God will make me alert and give me clarity to minister. Prayer—as my wife listens to the scanner after I’m gone, following each development and seeking God’s protection and guidance. Prayer—what I offer for saints and sinners as they face turmoil. Prayer—for firefighters, law enforcement officers, dispatchers, and emergency medical personnel, all trying to cope with stresses and horrors few of us can imagine. Prayer—for help to lead a seeking soul to salvation and new life in Christ.

Through prayer, we acknowledge our complete dependence on God who directs us in the midst of chaos—who can take a word, a glance or a gesture and reveal, through that human expression, his love that breaks through sorrow, pain and loss.



A shooting at AGTS?

Despite the sounds of guns firing and the sight of students collapsing to the floor, bystanders were happy to learn the events at AGTS on October 22 were only a drill.

Demonstrating AGTS’s commitment to educational innovation and community involvement, 1981 alumni Manuel Cordero and Robby and Betty Jernigan staged a crisis-training session at the seminary, involving AGTS staff, local media, police and emergency personnel.

Watch local TV coverage and see photos of the event at www.agts.edu/more/crisis251.