

# Starting and Strengthening Law Enforcement Chaplaincy Programs

9/2025

## About ICPC



- Founded in 1973, ICPC equips agencies to launch and strengthen chaplaincy programs and supports individual chaplains through training, peer networks, and credentialing.
- ICPC is a 501(c)(3) professional association serving 12 U.S. regions and members in 22+ countries. We are non-proselytizing, interfaith, and mission-focused.

## Why Chaplaincy—Why Now

Policing today faces unprecedented pressures: repeated exposure to trauma and loss, recruitment and retention challenges, rising suicide risk, moral injury, complex behavioral-health calls, fentanyl and overdose crises, mass-violence events, digital evidence and body-worn cameras, and intense community expectations. Professional chaplaincy provides trusted, trauma-informed support that centers wellness, resilience, and procedural justice – for officers, professional staff, families, victims, and the community.



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## Step 1: Define and Explore Goals

- Structured Planning: Start by outlining clear objectives for your chaplaincy program. Decide your departments main focus, either officers, victims, or the community, and document these in a strategic plan.
- Organic Dialogue: Engage in informal discussions with department members and community leaders to gain additional insights and refine your goals. This can help ensure that your objectives remain relevant and adaptable.
  - Action Steps:
    - Draft a strategic plan with clear objectives.
    - Schedule informal meetings or coffee chats with key stakeholders for feedback.



## Step 2: Identify and Engage Candidates

- Structured Search: Use surveys and community resources to identify potential candidates. Host formal meetings or workshops to introduce the program and gather interest.
- Organic Engagement: Attend community events to meet clergy in a more relaxed environment. Encourage department members to bring forward names of clergy they respect.
  - Action Steps:
    - Distribute surveys and contact local religious organizations.
    - Attend community events and encourage department members to network.



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## Step 3: Evaluate and Select

- **Structured Evaluation:** Conduct formal interviews and reference checks for shortlisted candidates. Use a predefined evaluation criteria sheet to ensure consistency.
- **Organic Assessment:** Allow candidates to participate in department activities on a trial basis. Use continuous feedback from all parties involved to assess fit.

### Action Steps:

- Prepare evaluation forms and set up interviews.
- Invite candidates for trial participation and gather ongoing feedback.

### Rare Cases and Considerations:

- **Community Nuances:** Be mindful of local cultural and religious dynamics that might affect candidate selection.
- **Resource Constraints:** Adjust the balance between structured and organic methods based on available resources and time.

### Actionable:

- Integrate structured planning with organic feedback loops.
- Balance formal candidate evaluations with trial engagements.
- Keep communication open and continuous to refine objectives and methods.



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# Chaplaincy Guide

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## 1. For Leaders Considering a Chaplaincy Program

- **Leadership endorsement:**

The chief/administrator publicly supports chaplaincy, designates a program liaison, and provides policy guidance and access.

- **Confidentiality & Trust:**

Officers must trust the chaplain. Define confidentiality limits (e.g., imminent harm) and emphasize non-judgmental, non-proselytizing care.

- **Availability & Presence:**

Ride-alongs, shift visits, and on-call coverage build credibility and insight into the realities of the job – days, nights, weekends.

- **Ministry of Presence:**

Field chaplaincy is listen-first and action-oriented: calm in chaos, brief interventions, warm handoffs – not sermons. Shown them how you care before you tell them how you care.

- **Integration:**

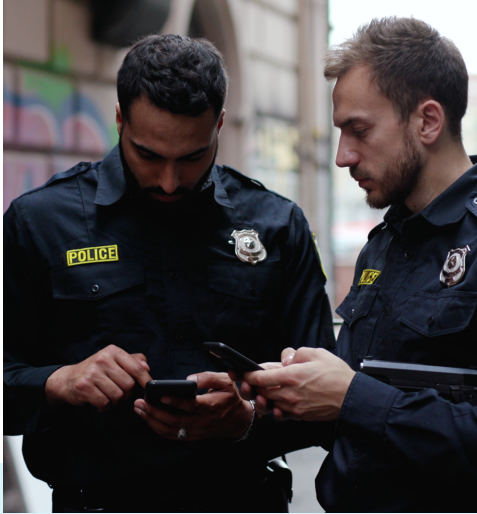
Align with wellness/EAP, peer support, clinicians, victim advocates, PIO, and ICS. Chaplains are part of a multidisciplinary team.

## 2. What Law Enforcement Chaplains Do

- Provide confidential, trauma-informed care to sworn and professional staff and their families; coordinate with EAP, peer support, and clinicians.
- Assist with death notifications and next-of-kin support; respond to suicides/attempts, fatal crashes, overdoses, mass-violence and critical incidents; support post-incident defusings/debriefs.
- Support victims and witnesses; liaise with community faith leaders and service partners for homelessness, addiction, and mental-health needs.
- Teach on stress and resilience, sleep/shift health, ethical decision-making, family life, moral injury, pre-retirement, and grief.
- Visit sick or injured personnel; attend promotions, graduations, memorials—by request and without proselytizing.
- Serve on wellness/awards/review boards; uphold agency policy, safety/PPE, ICS, and cultural competence.



## 3. Introduction to Chaplaincy



Few professions encounter more situations that can demoralize and create emotional, mental, and spiritual burdens than law enforcement. Those burdens ripple to families and colleagues. A trained chaplain – serving all people regardless of belief or background – listens with empathy, advises calmly, and provides practical support. On call around the clock, chaplains show up when needed and requested.

## 4. A Practical Model to Launch Your Program

- Chief meets with an experienced ICPC chaplain to outline role, duties, and department/community context.
- Chief invites area clergy to a briefing/breakfast; chaplain provides an overview; ride-alongs offered.
- 30–60 days later, reconvene interested clergy; present program guidelines and probationary period.
- Appoint a department liaison to coordinate training, ride-alongs, and scheduling; leverage an experienced chaplain as trainer.
- Run background checks and conduct interview boards; chief selects and commissions chaplains; hold swearing-in with appropriate publicity.
- Introduce chaplains at roll calls; issue ID/PPE; explain activation procedures; enroll chaplains in ICPC for ongoing education.



## Step 5: Recruiting Chaplains

### THE VOLUNTEER

- Define program purpose and scope in writing (officer, family, victim, community). Set policy for activation, confidentiality, training, and supervision.
- Identify candidates through department referrals, ministerial associations, and community networks. Invite all local clergy to an orientation and ride-alongs.
- Screen carefully: background check (required), written references, and an interview board (leadership, officers, an experienced ICPC chaplain).
- Be willing to say no when there is not a good fit. Not all clergy are suited for high-tempo crisis work.

### THE FULL-TIME CHAPLAIN

- Request an ICPC list of chaplains seeking full-time roles; consult agencies with established full-time programs.
- Assess internal volunteers for readiness; coordinate with denominational chaplaincy divisions where relevant.
- Advertise through police associations and ICPC channels; run full screening and interviews as above.



## 6. Credentials: Role, Access, Identification

- Chaplains may be sworn or non-sworn, but function as staff to the head of agency with access aligned to policy and mission.
- Chaplains carry department-issued identification and present themselves professionally. The chaplain's role is supportive—never interfering with operations.
- Access to stations, hospitals, and scenes is governed by the incident commander and department policy.

## 7. Nomination and Appointment

- Selection should involve departmental leadership and, where appropriate, interdenominational clergy associations.
- Chaplains serve under agency authority, represent their faith group in good standing, and deliver ecumenical, non-proselytizing care.

## 8. Qualifications & Core Qualities

- Endorsed clergy in good standing with 5+ years of ministry experience (typical).
- Demonstrated compassion, cultural humility, emotional stability, and flexibility.
- Willing to be screened, trained, and available as needed; clean criminal history; valid driver's license.
- Committed to ethics, confidentiality limits, and collaboration with community resources.
- Engages in continuing education; familiar with ICISF, NIMS, disaster response, and local referral networks.



## 9. Duties & Responsibilities

- Assist with notifications when personnel are injured or killed; accompany families and respond at hospitals.
- Visit sick or injured personnel at home or hospital; attend and participate in funerals and memorials when requested.
- Be present during major demonstrations or large-scale events to support personnel.
- Provide confidential counseling/coaching on request; participate in in-service training.
- Offer invocations/benedictions at graduations, promotions, awards, and ceremonies – when appropriate and requested.
- Represent the department at public functions at the Chief's request; foster liaison with community clergy.
- Respond to major disasters (e.g., bombings, building collapses, fires, industrial accidents) within safety parameters.
- Coordinate with victim assistance; provide referrals when specialized services are required.

## 10. How to Get Started as a Chaplain

- Meet with the chief/sheriff to express interest and learn department needs; request periodic ride-alongs.
- Build rapport through roll-call introductions and ride-alongs; observe carefully, ask respectful questions, and follow safety directions.
- Be available and visible; leave contact information; follow through on offers to help.
- Assess needs you observe (e.g., death notification, domestic disputes, stress risks); propose concrete ways you can support the agency.
- Share the vision with your faith community to secure support for your time and availability.





## 11. Training: What a Chaplain Needs to Know

*Beyond a pastoral heart, chaplains need field-relevant knowledge and skills. ICPC offers a rotating curriculum that includes core topics such as:*

- Critical-incident response and stress management; defusings and debriefings
- Death notification; suicide prevention and postvention
- Disaster response; Incident Command System (ICS)
- Domestic violence; child abuse; victim assistance
- Ethics; cultural competence; sensitivity and diversity
- Law enforcement family dynamics; grief and moral injury
- Legal liability and policy; interdepartmental relationships
- Physical fitness, sleep and shift health; resilience practices
- Substance use; overdose and fentanyl considerations
- Public ceremonies; media awareness; community faith liaison



## 12. ICPC Credentialing Levels

- *The Basic Credential*
  - To be eligible to apply for the Basic credential, an ICPC member and document the completion of 3.5 CEUs (35 training hours, with a minimum of 1.5 CEUs earned in the 10 ICPC Chaplain Basic Training).
- *The Liaison Credential*
  - To be eligible to apply for the Liaison credential, an ICPC member and document the completion of 4.0 CEUs (40 training hours, with a minimum of 2.1 CEUs earned in the 10 ICPC Chaplain Basic Training courses and the four Liaison Officer Training).
- *The Senior Credential*
  - To be eligible to apply for the Senior credential, an ICPC member must be a Full member and hold the Basic credential document the completion of 15 CEUs (150 training hours, with a minimum of 1.5 CEUs earned in ICPC courses) in topics related to chaplaincy and/or law enforcement have served a law enforcement agency as an active, appointed chaplain in good standing for not less than five years (not necessarily consecutively)
- *The Master Credential*
  - To be eligible to apply for the Master credential, an ICPC member must be a Full member and hold the Senior credential
  - document the completion of 35 CEUs (350 training hours, with a minimum of 3.5 CEUs earned in ICPC courses) in topics related to chaplaincy and/or law enforcement have served a law enforcement agency as an active, appointed chaplain in good standing for not less than 10 years (not necessarily consecutively)
- *Diplomate/Fellow:*
  - Highest level of recognition within the International Conference of Police Chaplains (ICPC), awarded to individuals who demonstrate exceptional commitment through tenure, education, professional training, and service to the organization and law enforcement community.



## 13. Constitutional & Policy Validation

- Properly structured chaplaincy programs are constitutional when services are secular in purpose, voluntary, non-proselytizing, and available to all. Courts have upheld legislative, military, hospital, and volunteer police chaplaincies on these grounds. Local counsel should review policy to ensure alignment with current case law and agency practice.



### Contact Us:

**International Conference of Police Chaplains**

**373 E. Val Vista Blvd., Casa Grande, AZ 85122**

**520 - 317 - 5171**

**[office@icpcchaplains.org](mailto:office@icpcchaplains.org)**

