



Sierra Law Enforcement Chaplaincy

March 2011 Newsletter

Dear Friends,

The call came from the police dispatcher who said, "Chaplain, we need you down here at the department immediately. As I drove to the department, I listened to my police radio and tried to determine from the radio traffic what was taking place. It was difficult to listen to all the channels at once and comprehend what was taking place -- it was very chaotic. I heard the paramedics responding to a local elementary school. Then I heard both the police and sheriffs setting up a command post. I heard the SWAT Team arrive on scene and set up their own command post. By the time I arrived at the Placerville Police Department, I realized there had been a shooting at the elementary school, and with the paramedics on scene, I was sure someone had been shot. The Police Chief briefed me and what I learned was that a disgruntled janitor at the school had walked into the principal's office and shot him.

The janitor was still at large, and I could hear on my radio that the SWAT Team was systematically searching the campus for him. The school was on complete lockdown, and naturally, children were texting their friends and parents which created panic among the parents. Terrified parents tried to get into the crime scene to see if their children were okay. I realized that I could not minister to everyone who was going to be impacted by this event, so I called in three other chaplains. I had one chaplain go to the police command post another to the Sheriff's command post, and another to the fairgrounds where the children were going to be bussed and released to their parents

I knew I could count on my chaplains to care for the needs of the parents and children who were shocked by the events of the day. I also knew the person who would be the most impacted would be the principal's wife. So I went straight to the hospital emergency room. The trauma team was still working on the principal and the wife had just arrived and was taken to a private room. Just at that moment the doctor came into the private room and let the wife know that they had lost her husband and had not been able to save him. Naturally, the wife crumbled under the weight of those words; I must admit I stood there stunned as well. Things like this don't happen in Placerville and they don't happen in an elementary school! Some of the nurses and I just stood around the wife and all we could do was grieve with her. The pain was enormous. This principal was your "All-American" guy. He was a very handsome man, had lettered in several sports in college, was very athletic, and cared deeply for the children of his school. Every morning he was out in the parking lot greeting the bus loads of children as they came to school. He also had a personal faith in God. He was a really wonderful man. After a few minutes, the woman's pastor arrived at the hospital, so I shifted my attention to the principal's brother. He was heartbroken and in a state of shock. I just let him cry and talk about his love for his brother.

The pastor decided to take all the family back to his church because they lived in Sacramento and the church was close to home and friends. They wanted to go in and say goodbye, and of course, the wife wanted to see her husband one last time. They were not able to see him for



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several hours because the E.R. had become a part of the crime scene. As the family left, the head nurse stopped me and asked if I would do a Traumatic Stress Debriefing with his medical trauma team which I assured him I would. After I left the hospital, I went to the fairgrounds where I had 3 other chaplains working with parents who were terrified and waiting for the buses to bring their children. One of my chaplains, Carl Johnson, did an excellent job of explaining to the crowd that the parents had to remain calm or they would further traumatize their children because many of the children did not know what had happened and thought the scenario they had seen was just a drill.

I next went to the two dispatch centers, the Sheriff's and the Placerville Police Department. I talked to the dispatchers about the trauma of handling the calls and listening to the horror of the school secretaries as they called in the shooting. They also talked about their sense of helplessness -- of not being able to do anything but listen. And of course they talked about their frustration of having their own children in school and not being able to leave their job and go and pick them up and make sure they were okay. I emphasized with all of them that their Heavenly Father was watching over their children and that I continued to pray for their safety. It really wasn't the time or place to jump into a deeper discussion because they were still handling calls for service and there were still other crimes going on in the city and county. Afterwards, I went and met with some of the SWAT Team members and told them what a good job they had done securing the school, finding the bad guy, and how thankful I was for their dedication and that I had been praying for them and I was so glad that everyone was going home to their family safe that night.

I then went back to the hospital at 6:00 PM to conduct the Traumatic Stress Debriefing with all the emergency room staff. I let them vent their frustration at not being able to save the man, their own traumatic reactions, and their own fears about the safety of their children who were in school. I was able to address their spiritual issues of why God let this happen, why God didn't answer their prayers to save this man, and why God would allow this to happen to one of His children. I am always amazed how many times these issues are under the surface but no one is willing to raise the question. That is just one reason why it is good to have a chaplain conduct the debriefing.

The many services we rendered that day and the significant follow up services were possible because of your generous giving and many prayers for us. As our country goes through difficult economic times, the Sierra Law Enforcement Chaplaincy is also impacted. Our funding has diminished, and we need to raise more support, especially in these challenging times which create an even greater demand for our services. Please prayerfully consider the value we bring to our county and how you may be able to increase your giving and encourage others to give to further sustain the important work that we do.

In His Service,

Tim Thompson, D. Min., C.T.R. Chief Chaplain



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PLEASE PRAY WITH ME FOR...

- ◆ The wife, children and extended family of the principal who was murdered
- ◆ Additional financial support for our ministry to law enforcement personnel and victims of crime
- ◆ The mother of the 26 year-old man who has decided to stop all but palliative care
- ◆ A retired sergeant fighting cancer
- ◆ Some officers who were recently let go by the department
- ◆ A sergeant's wife suffering from seizures
- ◆ An officer on administrative leave who has been having seizures
- ◆ A lieutenant recovering from back surgery
- ◆ A good friend who is a seminary professor suffering from two different types of cancer
- ◆ Our 100th Anniversary Division and the 50th Anniversary of the 50th Division-- especially the