



It is 8:30 Monday morning, and I am just backing out our driveway to head to work. With my portable radio on in the passenger seat, I think through my basic plan for the day. But when a new call comes through to the dispatcher, my plans change, a common occurrence I know well.

The radio chatter reports that a student in a building trades class at the local community college has fallen off of scaffolding and is unresponsive. In minutes, I am on scene where a small army of medical and law enforcement personnel are busily attending to the patient, one actively performing CPR. Others are keeping a clear path so emergency vehicles can move about as needed. School employees are dealing with other students and various aspects of the situation.

While CPR continues amidst the intense atmosphere, I tell the emergency responders that I am there and ready to help. I meet school staff and students. I give eyewitnesses a chance to share their experiences and to express their thoughts and feelings related to the traumatic event. Not only did the older student fall off of scaffolding, but he landed in a fifty-five gallon barrel. He had to be removed from the container and laid on the ground in order to be treated.

One of the school officials I meet is in charge of the building trades courses. I agree to accompany him locate the student's emergency contact information and inform the family. At the college administration building, we gather contact information. The administrator and I drive to the address we have, but it doesn't exist. We are on the east end of the street, so we drive to the east north end, but still don't find the house we need.

Though informing family of such serious accidents over the phone is not the ideal option, it is our only choice. I reach a son of the victim and tell him of his father's accident and condition and tell him I will meet him at the hospital emergency room. By vehicle, the son is one and a half hours away. I am amazed that he had cell phone coverage, based upon his work location.

The school official and I part ways; I head to the emergency room and he returns to the school scene. I continue to be impressed by the school staff's concern and initiative in taking care of everyone impacted by the accident.

At the emergency room, medical staff provide professional care of their patient, conducting exams, running tests, and making their diagnosis. The student's situation appears grim. The hospital's chaplain provides the invaluable service of acting as a liaison between the doctors and family, a role he in which he is an expert.



The Kalispell Regional Medical Center where I am a frequent visitor.

The son I initially called finally arrives. I sit with him, another relative and the hospital chaplain as they receive bleak news from consulting specialists. Within a short time, the patient succumbs to his injuries and dies. Like all fatal trauma, this tragic news brings shock, pain and grief.

Other family members and friends make their way to the hospital. They console one another, ask questions, and process the day's events. This continues for hours. I help provide the available details, answer questions, give comfort and assist them with the next steps. College personnel also arrive at the hospital in support of the family.

In the midst of this, I receive a phone call from a dad I had met at an incident earlier in the summer. The father called to update me on his son who, last summer, was found at home, not breathing and without a pulse. Fortunately, the son was resuscitated by medics and is now doing well.

While continuing to provide care for the grieving family and rejoicing with the dad over his son's improving condition, I receive another call, this one from a friend who needed input in dealing with a felony crisis. Immediate steps needed to be taken so justice can be accomplished. I direct him to the appropriate officer so progress can be made.

By three o'clock in the afternoon, I have completed my initial work with the family whose life was radically impacted by the day's sad events. We part ways, but my work will soon move to the follow up phase. Within a short time, I mail grief materials so the family understands what to expect in the coming months and to aid them in coping with the death of their loved one.

While my plans for the day certainly changed, I am reminded that this is a core part of serving as a chaplain to emergency responders. Being there when the unexpected occurs meets vital needs in our community. I am encouraged by the level of expertise and professionalism demonstrated by medics, law enforcement, hospital staff, school personnel and all who served this family in their pressing time of need.

Days such as these, with intense circumstances and hours of concentrating on the needs of others, result in my feeling emotionally spent. But these days also bring a distinct reward because I know it was time and energy well invested.

Thank you for your part in making Braveheart a reality in our community.

With gratitude,
Drew