



Braveheart Chaplain Ministry



Winter 2016

‘A friend loves at all
times, and a brother is
born for a difficult time.’
- Proverbs 17:17



Repeat customers. In most businesses, they are depended upon because they help provide a solid basis of sustainability. After ten plus years as an emergency responder chaplain, I now have the experience of serving families for the second time.

This summer, I responded to an Advanced Life Support (ALS) medical call. As I approached the house where an elderly female was having a serious medical issue, a lady eagerly came down a wheelchair ramp towards me with her arms held open while declaring how glad she was to see me again. While her face looked familiar, the reason for her familiarity remained a temporary mystery. She hugged me and quickly reminded me that I had been to her parent's home before when her dad needed medical attention. On that concerning occasion, I joined their large family at the hospital's emergency room.

This time, we again sat together at the hospital's emergency room and talked about pertinent issues as family members began showing up. Their faces were familiar, but I had to re-learn names. Again, they are comforted by a chaplain presence, a ministry they had benefitted them before.

Another day I am in the E.R. waiting room, tending to a family when some recognizable faces begin to come in. As before, my mind races to place these faces with the appropriate scene. As two of them make their way in, I connect them to a difficult death call this past summer. A middle age close relative had unexpectedly died in one of their backyards. It was emotionally intense. Grief was both audible and visible. A few days later I had conducted the funeral and was blessed to be a part of their journey. My seeing them again was a semi-happy reunion because the source of our relationship was sad, but our sharing the experience had created a bond between us.

In another incident, I responded to a medical call in a chain drug store. When I arrived, an adult daughter was informing the medics of what had happened with her mom. I introduced myself to the daughter who reminded me that we had met before. She and I had talked on the phone when a family member of hers was out of state because he needed specialized medical attention. I also casually knew him from work circles. This past connection allowed her to share personal issues more readily and to trust that I was there to help her.



Recently, I responded to a medical situation in a residence. A friend and family member were present who normally provide home health care for the patient. Though she is transported to the medical center, it seems that all will turn out o.k. A couple of days later I see the friend in Costco and get an update on the patient. Again, there is a connection because people appreciate assistance when they are in the more challenging trenches of life.

All of these second encounters with families remind me of how messy life is. As a friend of mine aptly says, "Life is a contact sport!" Life holds lots of difficulties, challenges, and questions. We have been placed in each other's lives to help one another and we all need it at different times.

Naturally, first time interactions with citizens in crisis continue. It is Sunday night. I have been asleep for 15 minutes. Dispatch awakens me requesting that I respond to a home for an unexpected, unattended death meaning medical caretakers such as hospice are not involved. A middle age female has died.

I console and listen to the surviving family member as he deals with shock and a severe loss. His circumstances are compiled by numerous factors. After the funeral home takes the deceased into their care and the coroner and other law enforcement officers leave the residence, I remain for a brief time, but also leave as the survivor requests time alone. I follow up with phone calls during the weeks that follow and attend the funeral in support of him. Grief materials will be mailed before long.

On a recent Sunday morning, I was ready to go to our church's morning service with my family when the Flathead County Sheriff's Office search & rescue coordinator called to ask if I could respond to a scene. A younger man had died the day before in an avalanche while snowmobile riding with two friends, all of whom were professional level riders. When I arrive 45 minutes later, search and rescue (SAR) crews were there in case they were needed to extricate the deceased since he could not be removed the day of the tragedy. Fortunately, Two Bear Air's rescue helicopter was able to recover the body without incident.

I arrived and spent an hour or so talking to one of the riders and others connected to the situation. There was the typical shock, pain, tears, disbelief, and expression, "We never thought it would happen to us."

Later the SAR coordinator and I made phone contact with the widow. She and her relative appreciated the call, but did not need us at that time. During the following days, I conducted follow up with the two riding partners who lost a close friend. The rugged journey of grief had begun for them.

A few days later, firefighters are dispatched to a residential fire. Smoke was visibly coming from the home and firefighters were busy getting water on the flames, creating ventilation on the roof, and checking for people inside. A search for the indoor dog also becomes a significant issue as the homeowner was quite concerned about the pet's well-being. Gratefully, no one was injured, however, the home owners suffer the emotions that such a situation consistently cause people, notably fear, worry, and despair. Fortunately the damage is restricted to some garage contents and smoke damage in the house. I contact Red Cross to begin the process of involving them with the family.

Several days later I stop by the home owner's business to check on her. She appreciates the follow up and conveys her own hope because of her faith in God. While I visited her with the goal of encouraging her, I left very uplifted because of her vibrant faith forged over many years.

A week later on a Tuesday afternoon around 1:15 p.m., I am in my work vehicle, a Dodge Durango, and am one block away from my office, when suddenly a police officer declares over the radio, "Shots fired! Shots fired! Suspect down!"

These jolting words concretely change my afternoon plans. I wait to hear the location, determine where the address is, and begin making my way. Upon arrival, I learn that two officers have shot a man, and that medics were inside with him. Soon they roll the wounded man out on a medical cot and load him into the ambulance.

Additional officers are on scene from both the city department that was involved, and deputies from our sheriff's office. The others residents who were in the house at the time of the shooting have been placed into patrol cars. The involved officers are driven to the police station.

After the police yellow tape is put into place, I am assigned the job of keeping the log of who goes beyond the tape. My assignment does not last long as I am soon sent to the police station to check on the two officers.

With an officer involved shooting, an outside agency is given the responsibility of investigating the shooting. In the days that followed, I was involved in multiple conversations with the two primary officers and with other ones who had been on scene. Follow up also included Sheriff's Office staff who conducted the investigation. I also have interchanges with the hospital chaplain in order to keep abreast of the patient.

Life's ups and downs mean people's lives will be adversely affected. Braveheart exists to help responders, their families, and citizens in crisis to move forward through life's difficulties.

Blessings,

Drew



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