

Sparks in the Stubble:

Ministry to Emergency Service Personnel in the Parish Setting
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Introduction

The events of 11 September 2001 have caused many to focus on the special spiritual and emotional needs of Emergency Service Personnel¹ particularly after responding to a call of this magnitude. Perhaps one of the positive outcomes of this cataclysm is that a new collective awareness has developed among psychologists and religious leaders that concentrates more on the needs of Emergency Service Personnel.

The majority of the assistance offered to and that continues to be utilized with Emergency Service Personnel involved in the World Trade Towers Disaster is psychological, not spiritual, in nature. Certainly therapy, support and ongoing assessment are very important to the treatment of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. But healing will require more than therapy and attendance at Critical Incident Stress Debriefings.

There have also been strong spiritual resources available to Emergency Service Personnel: excellent on-scene support by various clergy such as emergency services chaplains (FDNY, NYPD, PAPD, FBI, ATF, Hatzolah), military chaplains, interagency chaplains (various regional Critical Incident Stress Teams from New York, Connecticut and New Jersey, the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army, the Volunteers of America), independent chaplaincy groups (Peace Officer Ministries, The Ultimate Firehouse) and area clergy showing up at “Ground Zero” lending their aid. This disaster has also spawned the production of some wonderful literature (American Bible Society booklets, *God’s Word for Peace Officers* September 11th, 2001 Edition, etc.). But healing will require more than just casual conversations with chaplains, attendance at on-site prayer services and reading specially prepared material.

As an advocate for the spiritual well being of Emergency Service Personnel for the past 26 years it is our position that true healing comes only through Jesus Christ. We also contend that one of the most overlooked, yet most helpful instruments of healing—whether it be for the events of September 11th or for the never-ending slew of everyday emergency calls that are continuously processed through the 911 system—is the ongoing pastoral relationship between the Emergency Service Personnel and his/her parish pastor.²

In order for this relationship to be effective, two things are necessary: First, the Emergency Service Worker must be an active member of the parish, participating regularly in Her sacramental and worship life. Second, the pastor must understand the special needs of Emergency Service Personnel so that he can best apply Law and Gospel and the Church’s Word and Sacramental ministry in any given situation.

The purpose of this thesis is to address the latter.

¹ Emergency Service Personnel include, but are not necessarily limited to: Emergency Medical Technicians, Paramedics, Firefighters, Police Officers, Forensic Medical Examiners, and various types of Search and Rescue personnel. In a broader sense related professions may sometimes also be included in the definition in a limited way such as Emergency Room Physicians and staff, undertakers, and those involved in a disaster that would not see themselves as Emergency Service Personnel under normal conditions (i.e. construction workers, landfill operators, etc...).

² See John G. Fleischmann, “Death as a Way of Life: Ministering to Emergency Service Workers.” Unpublished Thesis, Concordia Seminary, 1986.

Understanding The Need for Ministry to Emergency Service Personnel

“Why would you *ever* want to do that?” I can still remember that pointed question from my roommate at Concordia, Bronxville in 1978 when I told him that I was an Emergency Medical Technician and that he was subject to being awakened by my Plectron (a radio alerting device once used by volunteer emergency workers). I was thankful that he tolerated those middle of the night intrusions into his sleep, and doubly thankful that he would listen to me when I got back from some of the more traumatic calls that would make even seasoned veteran emergency workers pause.

Emergency service work is not for everyone. For those who are not a part of it, it is difficult to understand why anyone would want to see and treat a trauma victim, face down the barrel of a perpetrator’s weapon, or plunge into searing, smoke charged hallways where even the cockroaches are scurrying out. For those who are involved, who “have it in their blood”, it is seen as a sacred calling, something that makes them whole people. A part of their psyche would die if their ability to serve as an Emergency Service Worker was taken away from them.

In speaking of this phenomenon, Dr. Jeffrey T. Mitchell, the internationally known traumatic stress expert and developer of the Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) process writes:

With the risks and demands of these professions, one has to wonder why a person would choose emergency services for a career or volunteer activity. People who choose a career with inherent powerful stressors have personalities that match them to the work or they would find it intolerable. Recent research indicates that emergency personnel such as firefighters, paramedics, and police officers have very different personalities from the average person who has a far less risky or demanding job.³

Mitchell goes on to list personality characteristics of Emergency Service Personnel: The need to be in control, obsessive (desire to do a perfect job), compulsive (tend to repeat the same actions for very similar events; traditional), Highly motivated by internal factors, action oriented, high need for stimulation, great need for immediate gratification, easily bored, risk takers, highly dedicated, strong need to be needed.⁴ It is disturbing to note that these personality traits are eerily similar to that of a sober alcoholic.⁵

In order to minister to Emergency Service Personnel in a direct way it is imperative that the pastor understands the Emergency Service Personnel personality. While neutral in itself, it can be the source of sinful narcissism, invincibility and even idolatry.⁶ It can also provide helpful insight into some of the struggles that Emergency Service Personnel wrestle with, including working through a critical incident (to be explained later).

The dilemma in this situation is that many—perhaps most – pastors have little or no understanding of the special needs of Emergency Service Personnel, nor understand the magnitude of pressure, emotion and sense of mortality experienced over the thousands of tours worked in an Emergency Service Personnel career.⁷ While, in a broad sense, the application of

³ Jeff Mitchell PhD., Grady Bray, PhD, *Emergency Service Stress: Guidelines for Preserving the Health and Careers of Emergency Services Personnel*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990). Page 19.

⁴ *Ibid.* Page 21.

⁵ Sheldon Zimberg, John Wallace, Sheila B. Blume, ed. *Practical Approaches to Alcoholism Psychotherapy*. Second Edition. (New York: Plenum Press, 1985). Page 5.

⁶ One common joke in EMS is: “What’s the difference between God and a Paramedic? God doesn’t think he’s a paramedic.”

⁷ Currently, the author is conducting a study of random pastors on their knowledge and understanding of ministry to Emergency Service Workers.

Law and Gospel to any individual requires no additional understanding other than that of the *Old Adam* and of Redemption, we maintain that specialized knowledge in this area can greatly improve the quality of ministry that any pastor can offer to Emergency Service Personnel in the parish. Another benefit is that such knowledge can better equip a pastor to deal with general traumatic incidents that occur to members of the parish who are not serving in the Emergency Services.

Defining some of the specific needs of Emergency Service Personnel

In order to best understand some of the ministry needs and opportunities to Emergency Service Personnel, there are several different issues that must be considered. They include, but are not limited to: Dealing with situations outside of the realm of human experience; dealing with one's own mortality; priorities and loyalties; and specific family related issues for Emergency Service Personnel. Due to the length of this monologue, space will not permit the full development of each of these issues. Much more could be said in support of each of the following points.

I looked at my watch—5:06 am. As we pulled out of the station I could hear the panic in the voice of the Captain of the first arriving engine company. I was on the backup Saturday night EMS crew, and was counting on sleeping through the night without interruption. Those plans were quickly thwarted as I began to increase the pressure on the accelerator of the ambulance and radioed the dispatcher that we were responding. The monotone voice came back on the speaker, “Thirteen Seventeen you’re responding at zero five zero seven. Be advised you’re responding to number Seven Clark Drive for a working dwelling fire.” I had a bad feeling about this one. A minute later the dispatcher called again, “Thirteen Seventeen, Camden County.” My partner, Mark, picked up the mic as I concentrated on my driving. “One three one seven” “Thirteen seventeen be advised Thirteen Thirty is requesting that you expedite your response, occupants within.”

The trip there seemed like an eternity, though later the records would show that our response time was only four minutes. As I pulled up, I saw a civilian performing CPR on a child on the front lawn. I looked at the sidewalk—a firefighter was performing CPR on another child. I looked at the side of the house. Another fireman. Another child. More CPR. “I got another one”. I looked up at the second floor window. Child number four was coming down the ladder in a firefighter’s arms. I immediately inserted an airway, and began to ventilate this four year old little boy with my pediatric BVM. The EMS Chief, Kevin arrived on the scene about the same time and took over compressions on the thirteen year old. While enroute to the scene He had already called for additional busses (an EMS term for ambulance) and they were now arriving on the scene.

We took four little boys to the hospital that morning. None of them made it. I felt so empty. Little boys aren’t supposed to die. Just a few short hours ago they were tucked in bed, sleeping soundly. We returned to the scene of the fire until FD finished the overhaul. We all sat in the back of the ambulance. Some of us were crying. Nobody said a word for over an hour. All I felt was nothing. A big, black emptiness.⁸

Emergency Service Personnel are often faced with such situations that are outside of the realm of human experience. The trauma, the loss of life, the imprint of horror experienced by Emergency Service Personnel in a month’s worth of tours may well be more than a normal person would see in two lifetimes. Such events leave a lasting impression on Emergency Service Personnel and can affect and alter one’s personality for the rest of his/her life.

⁸ A personal account of a multiple fatal dwelling fire that I responded to in May, 1981 while an EMT with Cherry Hill Emergency Squad, Cherry Hill, NJ.

In order to deal with the job, Emergency Service Personnel need to distance themselves emotionally from what they see. This enables them to function effectively and professionally.

For instance, if a person were to arrest (cardio/respiratory arrest) in line in the supermarket, the majority of the people standing in line would be emotionally affected by the incident for the next several days. Most would have recurring thoughts about the incident, have trouble concentrating, and find themselves wondering if they could have done more. Such an occurrence is outside of the realm of their experience. But for the Medic Unit that responds, this is a “meat and potatoes” kind of call. An hour after the incident, the Paramedics may be kidding around with each other, ordering pizza and not giving the call another thought—*ever*.

It is this kind of detachment that allows Emergency Service Personnel to perform in the worst of situations. But it is not without cost.

One cannot view such events in life without being affected. This is the first crucial area that a pastor must understand if he is serious about ministering to Emergency Service Personnel.

The effects are varied. Perhaps the most damaging effect is that as an Emergency Service Worker learns how to distance him/herself emotionally from calls, he or she may also inadvertently distance him/herself from all pain and also from other people. Distancing oneself necessarily leads to a non-quantifiable hardening.

When the father of my best friend, Henry, died, I had no tears. We had many great times together—camping with the Boy Scouts, going over to his house for dinner—he was like my second father. I really loved him. But when he died it was like it didn't matter. I wasn't upset, I wasn't sad, I felt nothing. I almost felt like a hypocrite at the funeral. My years of work in EMS had finally totally shut my emotional life down.⁹

Such a realization is very revealing, as it can be very difficult for Emergency Service Personnel to admit the connection between their emotional well-being and the effects of the trauma witnessed on the job. This hardening can make it difficult to communicate feelings and thoughts to others, and necessarily affects relationships in a negative way. Most people who work in the emergency services also tend to deny that this is a problem, largely due to the fear of their peer group perceiving them to be weak. This also is an important component in understanding and ministering to those in the emergency services.

Dr. Raymond Shelton and Dr. Mark Lerner, in their landmark work, *Acute Traumatic Stress Management*, comment on these powerful, lasting effects of Traumatic Stress: “Traumatic Stress disables people, causes disease, precipitates mental disorders, leads to substance abuse, and destroys relationships and families.”¹⁰

Jeffrey Mitchell concludes that Traumatic Stress (he calls the same phenomenon “Critical Incidents”) can also be cumulative (*vis a vis* acute).¹¹

The ability to distance oneself from traumatic events and the subsequent shutting down of emotional responses to events that would horrify a lay person is necessary for Emergency Service Personnel to function. If not controlled, however, it can have lasting negative effects on the Emergency Worker.

⁹ From an interview with a Suffolk County, New York Paramedic.

¹⁰ Mark D. Lerner, Ph.D., Raymond D. Shelton, Ph.D. *Acute Traumatic Stress Management: ATSM: Addressing Emergent Psychological Needs During Traumatic Events*. Forward by Chief Raymond L. Crawford, Chief of Department, Nassau County Police Department, New York. (Commack, NY: The American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress, 2001). Page 17.

¹¹ Mitchell, pages 28, 30.

In reality, “bad calls” always have some kind of effect on even the most seasoned Emergency Worker. Most understand that an event such as the attacks on the World Trade Center, and the subsequent collapses of the Towers fit into this category. But events do not have to be of this magnitude to severely impact an Emergency Service Worker. In fact, the majority of what Mitchell calls “Critical Incidents” involve only one or two patients or victims.

Death or life-threatening injury to another Emergency Service worker tops the list of calls that fit into this category. A Line of Duty Death (LODD) tends to strip other Emergency Workers of the belief that they are invincible. Bonds between Emergency Workers are very close, and when such a loss occurs it is truly the loss of a family member.

On December 3, 1999, the Worcester, Mass. Fire Department received an alarm for an abandoned warehouse fire. Knowing that there was a potential of squatters residing in the building, two firefighters entered the building to perform a search. Soon afterwards they were disoriented and became lost. They radioed a “mayday” and stated they were running out of air (in their self contained breathing apparatus). Two more firefighters went in to find them. They also became disoriented and were never seen alive again. Another two firefighters then went in to find the four disoriented firefighters. They also perished. If it wasn’t for the action of a quick thinking battalion chief forbidding any other firefighters from going in, more lives would have been lost. “Fire Lt. John Baudin said firefighters were in a somber mood as they worked, forced to remain outside knowing that the missing firefighters were trapped.”¹²

Another type of incident that can cause traumatic stress to an emergency service worker is the death or serious injury to a child. “Kid calls are always the worst” says Paul Werfel, director of the Paramedic training program at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. “You do what you have to do.” No one wants to see a child hurt or killed. It goes against the natural order of things. Coupled with the horror of seeing a dead child is having to deal with the parents, who often are present when the child is being extricated or worked on.

Other traumatic calls include grotesque calls (such as a decapitation, evisceration, serious bleeding), calls with prolonged on scene time where a patient dies (such as in a motor vehicle crash where a victim cannot be extricated before his vital signs disappear), calls where the physical well being of the Emergency Service Personnel is threatened, calls where an Emergency Worker, usually a police officer, is forced to take a life of another person, and calls with extensive media coverage (usually such calls fit into one of the above categories, plus is constantly on the news, not allowing the Emergency Service Worker to ‘escape’ from it and begin the healing process).

To effectively minister to Emergency Service Personnel the pastor must understand that a good deal of what Emergency Service workers experience is outside the realm of the “normal” human experience.

Facing Personal Mortality Is An Issue

Closely related to these issues, and, perhaps the major fear lying behind them all is facing one’s personal mortality. With the exception of a soldier going into battle, Emergency Service Workers are among the most likely to die while in the process of discharging their duties. According to statistics, firefighting is the most dangerous occupation in the world.¹³ While this

¹² Carolyn Ivey, *Associated Press*, Tuesday, December 7, 1999.

¹³ Rita F. Fahy, *U.S. Fire Service Fatalities in Structures*. Quincy, MA: The National Fire Protection Association, July, 2002.

has been acknowledged for years, the recent events at the World Trade Center underscore this fact.

Police officers, as well have an extremely dangerous occupation. Every year at the memorial service at the National Law Enforcement monument, scores of names are added to the list of police and law enforcement personnel killed in the line of duty. The simplest things in police work can be the most dangerous: Effecting a traffic stop, responding on a domestic call, or even sitting in a parking lot of a grocery store.¹⁴

Emergency Medical Services personnel, likewise, but to a lesser extent, find a higher degree of mortality than the average profession. Uniforms can be mistaken for that of a police officer (causing some agencies to switch to a less formal look); patients can become violent on crews, and motor vehicle accidents can claim lives. Eight Emergency Medical personnel lost their lives in the collapse of the World Trade Center in September, 2001. Most recently, André Lehrens, FDNY EMS, was killed in a motor vehicle crash involving a drunk driver in East New York (Spring 2002).

Knowing these facts, the Emergency Service worker also has his or her own personal accounts of brushes with death, causing the statistics to become very real.

The knowledge of the distinct possibility of personal mortality causes some to view life fatalistically. Others become religious. Still others just don't think about it at all.

Some Other Issues

Other issues that define an Emergency Service Worker's makeup include a fierce loyalty to those with whom he/she works, a strong devotion to duty, and often an inability to define his/her life in any other way. Most Emergency Service Personnel refer to those they work with as family, co-workers as "brothers" or "sisters". Emergency Service Personnel really have their own sub-culture that cannot be fully appreciated by the outsider.

In some ways this is very positive. It provides an excellent environment to work in. It provides the knowledge that someone is always looking out for you, and you are always looking out for him. One of the age-old sayings of the Fire Service, for instance, when a firefighter is being rescued by his or her peers is, "you go, we go." Outside of the Emergency Services such loyalty is hard to find in such a literal way.

There is also a negative side to this. Loyalty between career and family can be confused. Because of the strong sense of commitment that many Emergency Service Personnel have for their subculture, family life (at home) can be neglected. Work schedules, at times, can conflict with family life.

Some studies indicate that those involved in Emergency Service work have a higher degree of marital discord, divorce, child rearing issues and substance abuse. In understanding the dual loyalties often taken on by an Emergency Service Worker, the outcomes of such studies are not unexpected.

Why These Things are Important for a Pastor to Know

What we have attempted to do so far is to draw a picture of some of the aspects of an Emergency Service Worker's life. Apart from the occasional peek into the lives of these

¹⁴ In July 1986, Suffolk County NY Police Officer Kenyon Tuthill was shot point blank in the face while sitting in the Key Foods parking lot (now a 'King Kullen'), sitting in his patrol car in Center Moriches. Miraculously, Officer Tuthill survived. He shared his story of the healing process to the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation's Third World Congress, Baltimore, MD, April 1993.

individuals by “real TV” programs such as *COPS*, “*The Bravest*” and “*Paramedics: Life on the Street*”, most people today—including pastors—have no real understanding of what these professions involve.

The point we are making is that in almost every parish there are worshippers and members who are also Emergency Service Workers. If a pastor is able to better understand the issues and events that they face every week, his ministry to these individuals can be greatly enhanced.

What is available today to help Emergency Service Personnel?

In our research we have discovered that there has been virtually nothing written to assist *pastors* in ministering to the needs of Emergency Service Personnel.

There has been much written on dealing with psychological needs of Emergency Workers.

Jeffrey Mitchell, Ph.D. developed the “Critical Incident Stress Management” (sometimes referred to as “Critical Incident Stress *Debriefing*”) program in the late 1970’s. Mitchell, a former firefighter and paramedic, saw that there was a void in the field of mental health in dealing with emergency service workers. According to Mitchell, this was the exigency that gave birth to his process, which is considered by many—including Emergency agencies in all 50 states, the FBI and all branches of the United States Military—to be the “standard of care” in dealing with post incident psychogenic trauma.

When one looks at Mitchell’s program, which is excellent, it becomes very apparent that he avoids speaking of anything spiritual. His section on “chaplains” takes up less than two pages in his book. When one looks at the chart of how a critical incident affects the life of an Emergency worker, we see that a category is omitted. His categories are: Cognitive, Behavioral, Emotional, and Physical. Anyone who has studied the components of human existence knows that there is a fifth category: Spiritual. Yet this does not appear. It is difficult to see this as being a non-intentional omission. Several agencies have added the spiritual component and have contacted the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (Mitchell’s parent group), but the category remains non-existent in the process in all of the recent literature. If one is to be critical of Mitchell’s process, this is the area where it is weak. While he seeks to avoid dealing with the spiritual side of things—which is entirely legitimate—he chooses the path of ignoring it. Perhaps in the future he will amend his process to include it in their hand-out literature, given to participants in Critical Incident Stress Debriefings.

There are other developments in the area of psychological assistance to emergency workers as well. Dr. Raymond Shelton (who, by the way, *does* acknowledge the spiritual component of life) published a book entitled *EMS Stress*. His book is more proactive than works of Mitchell, and seeks to encourage healthy living on the part of EMS personnel. He maintains that this is the best mitigation in preventing calls and incidents from becoming “critical” to emergency workers.

Marc Lerner and Raymond Shelton have recently developed another process known as “Acute Traumatic Stress Management” (“ATSM”) where during an event an attempt is made to reduce the stress effects on both Emergency Workers who respond to and victims who experience terrible events. The data still seems to be out on this, whether or not it is effective, but preliminary results have been, according to their text, quite positive.

Following the events of September 11th, it seems that many other individuals and agencies are jumping on the “disaster effect” band wagon and a plethora of programs, processes

and training seminars for counselors have emerged. In assisting the general public this may be helpful, but many of these agencies have been reaching out to the emergency services. What they do not understand is that their services will not be welcomed simply because they do not understand and are not a part of the subculture of the emergency services. This is why Mitchell's process works so well—it relies heavily upon *peers* from within the emergency service to lead the process. Brothers debrief brothers. Not shrinks in turtleneck shirts.

On the religious side of things a lot has been written as well. However all of it seems to be in the area of chaplaincy work.

Chaplaincy work in the Emergency Services is vital. Most major fire and police departments in America have chaplains. When Mychal Judge was killed on September 11th, this was the first exposure that many people had ever had to a fire chaplaincy program.

Chaplains have been involved in the Emergency Services for well over a century. Usually they are ordained clergy from a religious institution within the response area of a fire or police department. Positions vary from volunteer to career. In the more successful chaplaincy programs, the Chaplains get to know all of the Emergency Workers in their department, are a “presence” both at times of emergency and significant times in the lives of the members.

Chaplains played a crucial role in the post- “Nine-Eleven” rescue and recovery effort. They were there to console those who had lost co-workers, they were there to perform Last Rites or moments of Prayer over bodies and body parts recovered from “the Pile.” They were there as a reminder that God had not forsaken us, even in the midst of the tremendous death and destruction that surrounded every inch of ground.

Chaplaincy has its limitations, however. For one, especially in the case of disaster, it is short term. Follow up for most chaplains in a major incident like the World Trade Tower collapses is next to impossible, as they literally interact with hundreds of people a day.

Chaplaincy also is sometimes reduced to “generic Christianity.” A chaplain must be comfortable working with people of all faiths and of no faith. In some cases, it is difficult and the chaplain becomes little more than a concerned party when dealing with someone of a different faith. For instance, when working with a Jewish police officer, the Chaplain loses the ability to provide hope and comfort because the Jewish police officer does not believe in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. In working with a Baptist, a Lutheran Chaplain can be limited in that he cannot use the Sacramental life of the Church to bring hope and peace.

This is not to question the deep and abiding Christian faith of many Chaplains, nor is it to say that a Chaplain is to be syncretistic and ignore what he believes so that he doesn't offend others, nor is it to imply that the Chaplain should never evangelize. The point is simply that the Chaplain is often limited in the amount of hope he can bring to someone in distress at a given moment.

Still, with all of these limitations, there is much written on Chaplaincy programs, and many are deeply involved in the emergency chaplain movement.

Perhaps the best training program that exists for Chaplains has been written by Dr. James Devine of the Pacific Northwest. Dr. Devine gives a strong Christian witness in all of his training materials and attempts to elevate the Fire Chaplain above the level of “hand-holder”. His book “*The ABCs of Fire Chaplaincy*” and his article, “*Beyond CISD*” both serve to show that many chaplaincy programs today are weak in their presentation of Christ, and that the chaplain needs to be more proactive about sharing his faith in Jesus with those that he is ministering to. His work is excellent in this regard.¹⁵

¹⁵ See www.theultimatefirehouse.com for more information on Dr. Devine's programs.

Most state fire chaplain associations provide training and manuals as well. In reviewing the New York State Fire Chaplain's Manual, it is apparent that it is written generically and could be used by a Christian, Jew or Muslim. Yet, the prayers and readings contained within could be altered, Jesus Christ added, and used by a Christian pastor without too much problem. This is the stated intent of the use of Association materials, since it must represent all faiths.

The Lutheran Church- Missouri Synod put out a post September Eleventh tape to be given to local fire departments. It was fast-paced, evangelistic in nature, and featured a pastor who is also a volunteer firefighter in the Midwest (it may have been more powerful if they used a pastor who was a firefighter in New York—there are at least 3 active firefighter-pastors in the Atlantic District alone). While the production of this tape was positive, it is puzzling why the Church body has reached out to firefighters of all faiths, much as a chaplain would, but has not given attention to those who are already emergency service workers in our pews. For sure, the psychological world has jumped on this immediately; the chaplaincy programs have as well. This is another indication that the Church has no idea what to do with ministry to Emergency Service Personnel.

So, What Can a Pastor Do?

There are many ways that a Pastor of the Gospel of Jesus Christ can reach out to Emergency Service Personnel in the pews and assist them. C.S. Lewis once said, "Some have paid me an undeserved compliment by supposing that my *Letters* were the ripe fruit of many years' study in moral and ascetic theology. They forgot that there is an equally reliable, though less creditable, way of learning how temptation works. "My heart" – I need no other's— 'showeth me the wickedness of the ungodly.'"¹⁶ Most of the following section required little research, it comes from knowing personal needs and failures, as well as triumphs and joys over the past 26 years of service as a firefighter, EMT, and Paramedic, and 16 years of being a Parish Pastor.

Know Your People

To begin with, a Pastor needs to know who his Emergency Service Personnel are. For most Pastors, who are involved with the day-to-day lives of their parishioners, this should present no problem. Time and talent surveys often used in congregations can provide this information. The pastor can also survey the congregation to get an understanding of what everyone does for a living if this information is not available. Identifying Emergency Service Personnel early on in ministry can be excellent preparation for when an incident should occur in the community.

It is also helpful if a pastor knows some of the distinctions of rank and training of those who are Emergency Service Workers. This can prevent confusion and hard feelings later when ministering to those involved. For instance, to the general public, a "Paramedic" is often anyone who rides on an ambulance; to those in the Emergency Services, a Paramedic is a highly trained advanced life support provider who is only dispatched on certain types of calls. Most ambulances are staffed with Emergency Medical Technicians, a different classification altogether. Within the Emergency Service, given the temperament of some of the personalities, calling an EMT a Paramedic or vice-versa, will generally bring a correction to the pastor by the Emergency Medical worker, and may cause that person to shut down because he/she feels that

¹⁶ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961. Page 9.

the pastor doesn't know what he is talking about. Likewise, understanding what rank a certain police officer holds can greatly enhance conversation with that officer.

In order to minister to Emergency Service personnel, the Pastor must know who they are and what they do.

Faithful Word and Sacrament Ministry

For the most part, ministry to Emergency Personnel is the same as ministry to anyone in the Parish. Weekly Eucharist, powerful preaching of the Word of God, in depth Bible Study and a strong life of fellowship in the parish contributes to strong faith on the part of those who commit themselves to such things. Everyone in the parish is blessed by this kind of ministry.

One of the studies that is currently being conducted hypothesizes that an Emergency Service Worker with a strong and active faith in Jesus Christ, who is involved in the life of the local parish handles the daily pressures of Emergency Service work better than those who do not have such faith or commitment.

The same study also is attempting to prove that Emergency Workers who are active Christians also fair better at times of Critical Incidents. When an Emergency Worker has the hope of Christ alive in his/her life, then one looks at death—including violent, traumatic or sudden—a lot differently than those who have no hope.

Emergency Service Personnel should be encouraged to take an active role in the life of the Parish, gathering around Word and Sacrament frequently, reenergizing faith through Bible Study, and using his/her gifts within the Body of Christ regularly.

Know Your Community

One thing that can be especially helpful in ministering to Emergency Personnel in the parish is for the Pastor to be cognizant of emergent events that take place in the communities in which the Emergency Service Personnel of a parish work, and then follow up with the workers to see if they were involved. Such events may include fatal fires in the community, serious or fatal traffic accidents, drownings, homicides, or any of the types of calls that fall under the category of Critical Incidents.

Calling on an Emergency Service parishioner who responded on an event like this can mean a lot. Even if the Emergency Worker declines to speak about the event, knowledge that his or her pastor cares how he or she is doing gives assurance that someone cares.

Encourage Emergency Workers to Attend a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing

One suggestion a Pastor can make following a traumatic call in the community is that an Emergency Worker attend a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing offered by his or her department. If one is not being offered, he can suggest to the Emergency Worker that he or she request that one be set up by the department or agency. Most geographic areas have a regional Critical Incident Stress Management Team that can be contacted through their county or regional communications center.

Critical Incident Stress Debriefings are a one-time meeting with those who responded on a given call, where the participants can openly share their thoughts and feelings pertaining to that call. Effects of the call are also looked at, and attendees are assured that they are having normal reactions to an abnormal event. After a time of sharing and teaching, participants go through a re-entry stage, where they can resume their duties as an Emergency Worker.

Research has shown that those who participate in Critical Incident Stress Debriefings are able to experience healing from the event more thoroughly than those who do not attend.¹⁷

Use the “Full Counsel of God” in Ministry to Emergency Service Personnel

One of the main differences between the ministry that your Emergency Service Workers from their chaplains on the job and you, is that as their Pastor you can bring to bear the full Sacramental and Doctrinal life of the Church into their situation.

A Pastor has an ongoing, involved relationship with his parishioners. He is not limited by the cautions of mentioning our hope in Jesus Christ and His Resurrection when speaking about death, as chaplains often are. He is not limited Sacramentally, as chaplains are, and is free to commune, anoint, bless, absolve and pray for the Emergency Workers of his parish as necessary.

A Pastor is also free to apply Law and Gospel to the lives of Emergency Service Workers that are of his flock. He is free, for instance, to confront an Emergency Worker whose marriage is failing because of the split loyalty in his/her life. He is also free to apply the salve of the Gospel to those who seek it.

The Pastor must be cognizant of the correct application of Law and Gospel, and understand that many times when he meets with an Emergency Service Worker, the Law has already been spoken in all of its power: someone has died, something bad has happened, he/she is in trouble. In such cases, it is the Gospel that needs to be heard, not more Law. So, in ministering to Emergency Service Workers, a Pastor must understand and not confuse the application of Law and Gospel.

The pastoral counseling setting is where understanding the Emergency Service Personality (mentioned previously) can be fruitful. Not only does it give the Pastor a clue as to how an Emergency Service Worker is thinking, but may also provide clues as to where certain sins or strengths may lie, assisting in working through issues. Knowing for instance, that an Emergency Worker can be very “anally retentive” and focusing on specific details, can assist the Pastor in helping the Emergency Worker look at the “broader picture” when working through an issue. When an Emergency Worker is over-dedicated to his/her calling, he or she may need to be reminded that there is more to life and relationships than the Emergency Services, and plead for some kind of balance in the Emergency Worker’s life.

The truest, best ministry to an Emergency Service worker occurs within the context of his or her own parish setting, with a Pastor who provides ongoing ministry, support and love.

Some Proactive and Preventative Initiatives

There are some other ways that a Pastor can provide ministry to his members who also wear a badge.

One great way to minister to Emergency Service Personnel in the parish setting is to have an annual “prayer-breakfast” for all of the members of the Parish that serve in this capacity. Let them get together, share their stories, eat and pray (and possibly have communion) in the context of the Parish. Usually, the conversation at these events takes care of itself. However, on some occasions, a Pastor may wish to have a guest speaker present a short program. We have found this to be a very effective practice, and it helps to build community within the church.

Another way to minister to Emergency Service Personnel is to stop by and visit them at their place of work, if this is possible. To drop by the firehouse unannounced and simply say

¹⁷ Mitchell, *Emergency Services Stress*, page 150.

“hello—I was in the area” can show true interest in the lives of firefighters. Most would be flattered if their Pastor did that.

For some Pastors who wish to become more involved, they can always become chaplains for a local fire or police department. This, of course, is a whole other avenue of ministry which is not for all pastors. Such a position, however, can be of great assistance in ministering to Emergency Workers in a given parish. It also provides great exposure for a congregation in the community, tying a congregation into some community events that it hasn't been a part of before, and provide countless evangelistic opportunities. It is interesting to note that in many of the smaller communities served by volunteer fire and EMS departments, pastors historically have become involved as actual fire fighters, emergency medical technicians and paramedics. This gives an extremely powerful witness to the members of the community that a pastor cares, and often can bring many new members into the Parish.

Summary and Conclusion

In this brief thesis, we have attempted to explain the uniqueness of the lives of Emergency Service Personnel. We have noted that the stressors associated with their calling in life are unlike those in any other career. We have attempted to show some of the unique characteristics of the Emergency Service Personality and how they complement these professionals yet at the same time effect distinct ministry challenges.

We have attempted to demonstrate that the psychological world has done much over the past two decades to meet the needs of Emergency Service Personnel, as has the religious world in the area of Chaplaincy. What has not ever—to our knowledge—been addressed is the role of the parish Pastor in the life of the Emergency Service Worker. We maintain that, as helpful as the existent psychological and pastoral material, processes and programs are, the most important relationship in the well being and healing of Emergency Service Personnel is the one with the parish Pastor.

Finally, we have attempted to begin to show some practical ways that can help a Pastor in understanding and ministering to this unique group of people in his parish.

In the third chapter of the apocryphal book of the *Wisdom of Solomon*, the writer pens a beautiful exposition of eternal life and salvation:

But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be an affliction, and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace. For though in the sight of men they were punished, their hope is full of immortality. Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good, because God tested them and found them worthy of himself; like gold in the furnace he tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them. In the time of their visitation they will shine forth, and will run like sparks through the stubble...¹⁸

The imagery provided by Solomon herein is beautiful, the comfort profound. At the time of National calamity through which we have just passed, these words bear tremendous hope for the families of Emergency Service Workers who died in the line of duty in Christ—either on September Eleventh, or at any other time.

¹⁸ The Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-7. While some have seen this to be a proof text for purgatory, the struggling and discipline of the Christian Faith referred to here happens on earth (see 1 Peter 1:3-9). It should be remembered that throughout his life, Martin Luther utilized the apocrypha in his daily lectionary, unlike the “protestantized” version of Lutheranism in America today that sees it as being “too Catholic.”

These words also provide tremendous hope and comfort to the thousands of Emergency Service workers who confess Christ and are members of our congregations. Through their love of the Lord and growth in His Kingdom; through the care and ministry that they receive from their Pastors, they are much better equipped to deal with the stressors and horrors of their day to day vocation than those who have no Savior and Lord. Through this strong assurance of eternal life, the fear of death is eradicated.

Through Baptism, all who are in Christ Jesus have a foretaste of what it means to “shine forth and ... run like sparks in the stubble.” This is especially true of Emergency Service Workers in our parishes.

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