

County-Wide Chaplaincy

Thanks you!

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According to religion statistics from Clark County per the 2010 census, 13.7% of the people in our county identified as Evangelical Protestants, and 6.3% as Catholics. The great majority of the county's population (71.6%) claimed no religious adherence. It is not surprising that we are often called to homes whose occupants have no religious connections.

When I respond to a call, I wear a uniform that displays the word, "Chaplain." Each side of my collar has a small silver cross. Most people, even the "none" category, understand that I represent the Christian faith without me saying anything. With death-at-residence calls, our primary purpose is serving first responders and surviving family members. We assist first responders as they direct; our presence allows them to leave and attend to other duties. We serve the family by listening, explaining next steps, helping to gather their support network, assisting in funeral home contact, providing useful written material, making the deceased one presentable if the family wants to say a last goodbye, and offering a prayer if requested. I do not initiate spiritual conversation, but do look for an "open door." My guiding Scripture is Colossians 4:2-6:



"Devote yourselves to prayer...praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ...Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person."

Family members are in a condition of distress and grief because one of their own has died that day. They hope their loved one is in a better place, seldom asking me for my input on this subject. Even if there is no open door, I trust that spiritual salt of presence will give them a little taste of God's Kingdom.

Before leaving the residence on a chaplaincy call, I normally ask the family if I can leave with them a Gideon New Testament (ESV NT with Psalms and Proverbs). So far, nearly everyone has accepted this small gift. On the two back pages of this Bible is a gospel presentation. Near the front is a section called, "Help in Time of Need." For those in "sorrow and grief," suggested Scripture readings include 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, Psalm 23, Psalm 34:18, and Psalm 147:3.

Even if we never have an opportunity to say anything about the gospel, we can leave them with a copy of God's written word. This is one way of being like the farmer who sowed the seed of God's word as explained in Jesus' parable in Matthew 13. Many people will never open the Bible. Some will read, but not follow through. Others will initially believe, but be distracted by the things of this world. Still others will trust in Christ and grow and produce fruit. After leaving the residence, I pray they will open that New Testament and read with an open heart, looking to the Spirit of God to reveal truth.

When people experience a death in the family, some may turn away from God in bitterness. Others will turn to God for mercy and comfort in their broken-hearted state. We pray for the surviving family members, that they will be in the latter group, going to God in their grief, pouring out their hearts before Him. I pray that God would respond to their prayers with grace and mercy, leading to truth and salvation.

For me, this is not a ministry that I would choose; teaching is my spiritual gift. However sometimes God directs us into areas of service that are difficult and humbling, outside of our realm of comfort. It makes me pray and depend on God.

Thank you for your prayers.
Chaplain Al Walter

Al Walter has served with County-Wide Chaplaincy for the past five years. In 2011 he retired from the Department of Corrections, having worked for 30 years at Washington State Penitentiary as a Correctional Officer (3 yrs), Classification Counselor (11 yrs), and Unit Manager (16 yrs). Educational background includes graduating from Washington State University in 1972 with a Bachelor of Science in Psychology and from Western Seminary in 2012 with a Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies. Most importantly, Al trusted Jesus the Messiah as Savior and Lord of his life in 1969 when he was 19 years old.

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