

# The Servant Leadership of a Law Enforcement Chaplain

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This paper provides the particulars of how the leadership of a law enforcement chaplain influences and motivates law enforcement officers to view society and their jobs differently than the negativity that often surrounds their profession. Many servant leader characteristics emerged from this study which is in direct correlation with the effectiveness and success of the chaplaincy program by one particular chaplain, Harold Elliott. This study explored these avenues through a qualitative inquiry to include the perceptions of Chaplain Elliott as he reflected on the past several years of his position. The research endeavor included questions that explored leadership influence, effectiveness, and the benefits to the community through in-depth interviews with the police department's sworn officers of all ranks and positions including the executive leadership. This research endeavor revealed some paramount issues related to the police department chaplaincy and servant leadership.

### *Theological Foundations for Law Enforcement Chaplaincy*

The chaplain ministry has a theological foundation, and the services performed are scriptural; aiding in the understanding of why a chaplain is willing to work in such an environment. It is important to identify terms that will clarify their desire to serve. The word *minister*, in a biblical sense, means to *serve* or *to be a servant*. A chaplain has been defined by *WordNet On-line Dictionary* (2003) as a clergyman ministering to some institution. When a chaplain is assigned to a law enforcement agency or some other organization, an act of service is provided. The word *theology* is defined by *The American Heritage Dictionary* (2000) as the study of the nature of God and religious truths. Theology also is derived from the combination of two Greek words: *theos* meaning *God* and *logos* meaning *word*. Theology, according to Cunningham (1992), is "the expression of the individual's understanding

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of God's purpose and participation in His Creation as reflected in that individual's activities or ministry" (p. 4). Thus, the chaplain is one who is under the authority of God and is a servant to the organization's members for whom he or she is assigned to care.

Jesus Christ instructed that we are to care for "the least of these" (Matt. 25:35) and "leave the ninety and nine to seek the lost sheep" (Luke 15:4). In John 15:12, Jesus Christ said, "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." All officers and the community they serve deserve care regardless of their present status. Similar to the military chaplains, law enforcement chaplains are taking the good news to the front line where others refuse to walk. As stated by Chaplain Thomas Shane (1987), "It is a call to bring cups of cool water to sisters and brothers who tremble in terror in unrelenting anguish and for whom there is no relief" (p. 16).

#### *Law Enforcement Chaplain's Services*

The chaplain wears many hats in the course of his or her duty. Duties performed by chaplains relieve field officers from dealing with situations for which they are not extensively trained to tackle or that are time consuming. These duties include building credibility, counseling, performing visitation, providing death notification, filling the role of liaison, and providing crisis intervention—all acts of servant leadership.

#### *The Chaplain's Influence and the Law Enforcement Officer*

Influence can be defined in many different ways and is the heart of leadership (Malphurs, 2003). Hersey and Blanchard (1993) stated that "a review of other writers reveals that most management agrees that leadership is the process of influencing the activities of an individual or group in efforts toward a goal achievement in a given situation" (p. 94). In the case of a law enforcement chaplain, the goal is to challenge officers to live their personal lives as well as their professional lives with ethics, morals, and convictions to do the right thing above all. Scripture challenges readers to consider the outcome of their leader's lifestyle and to imitate their faith (see Hebrews 13:7). In order for this influence to take place, first a relationship must be formed (Malphurs). Relational behavior values other people's needs and includes things like building camaraderie, developing trust, developing teams, motivating followers, providing good ministry conditions, nurturing and supporting followers, building a biblical community, promoting interpersonal relationships, counseling those needing direction, comforting the distressed, and encouraging the discouraged (Malphurs). The chaplain's role should also be to mentor officers who are willing to take the challenge and become spiritual and servant leaders themselves.

#### *The Successful Chaplain*

The chaplain's relationship is crucial for influence to take place (Cunningham, 1992; Malphurs, 2003). A chaplain who is truly called to this position, along with the other duties assigned, will possess a pastor's heart. Pastoral care is a function of the children of God when one bears another's burden and so fulfills the law of Christ as a way of reconciliation (see Galatians 6:2).

*Spiritual Leadership*

Through spiritual leadership, organizations can benefit as a result of being transformed. According to Fry (2002), “Spirituality is concerned with qualities of the human spirit such as love, compassion, forgiveness, sense of responsibility, sense of wholeness and harmony” (p. 11). A chaplain can provide spiritual leadership which Fry referred to as spiritual survival; instilling in the law enforcement officer that the service performed is important, has meaning, and makes a difference in the community. An altruistic love is one that has the interest of others as paramount. Certain characteristics of altruistic love in spiritual leadership are forgiveness, kindness, empathy/compassion, patience, courage, and humility (Fry). The one thing about altruistic love and its relationship to law enforcement officers is that this type of love is an internal belief and act of helping others without any consideration or expectations (Kouzes & Posner, 1999). The chaplain as a spiritual leader can help guide law enforcement officers, as Bass (1997) implied, “to move followers to go beyond their own self-interests for the good of their group, organization or community, country or society, as a whole” (p. 21). Service to others is the chaplain’s focus and ministry.

In addition to an altruistic love, another component of transformational leadership is when the chaplain as a leader possesses a true *agápao* love. Farling, Stone, and Winston (1999) stated that “Service is the core of servant leadership” (p. 63). *Agápao* love, according to Patterson (2003), “is a moral love where the leader does the right things for the right reasons at the right times” (p. 26). The law enforcement chaplain; as part of the ministry to others; can equip, train, and influence law enforcement officers to carry out the assigned professional duties and live a more productive personal life (Patterson, 2003).

The chaplain is also instrumental in assisting participants with wedding ceremonies, funerals, and other occasions due to his influence and rapport built over time. In addition, in many cases, the participants did not have a church home or a relationship with clergy. Participants also commented on a New Year’s Day breakfast which was served in the chaplain’s home each year. Each New Year’s Day holiday, the chaplain, without using the department’s money, prepared and served hundreds of meals to officers and their families. The participants stated that it was a way to bring the Arlington Police Department family closer together to foster a more personal relationship with one another. It was during that time that the relationship changed from strictly a professional connection to a personal one; building accountability, trust, and confidence. The officers felt as though Chaplain Elliott had a servant’s heart. One participant concluded when asked about the effectiveness of the chaplain:

Pretty much all the stuff I covered, I mean it provides someone there for not only friendship but professional knowledge. I mean, as far as advice, spiritual advice, just a whole realm of all these things that is part of one big [umbrella]. He covers all the aspects of spiritual, personal friendship, professional; he provides it all in one big package. And, there are guys that I know that are not Christians that will come talk to him because they know they can trust him. They know that he is not going to walk out of this office and go to the chief’s office and say, “Hey, guess what I just found out.” They know they can trust him (Moosbrugger, 2006).

Trust is a task that generally exemplifies the true meaning of leadership (Yukl, 2002) and what Patterson (2003) states is a characteristic of servant leadership. Chaplain Elliott has built this trust due to a long-standing relationship and consistent interaction with the officers. Chaplain Elliott has crafted a program that has built trust and confidence among the department personnel, and through his servant leadership, one that has provided him an invitation be part of the law enforcement family.

#### *Measuring the Effectiveness of the Chaplaincy Program*

A chaplain's effectiveness to an organization, according to Cunningham (1992), involves being available, visible, adaptable, and credible. The participants in this study affirmed these four areas which offers assistance to those agencies in determining the type of program to implement (part-time or full-time) and the kind of chaplain to employ.

#### *Available*

One of the themes the participants mentioned was the availability of the chaplain. The participants knew that when the chaplain's door was open, he was available to assist. The chaplain's presence in the department hallways, shift briefings, or calls was very important to the participants. A death notification is something with which officers deal on a regular basis, and the chaplain's assistance with these notifications was invaluable. Many of the participants stated that the current part-time program does not provide the same level of service as the full-time program provided, leaving the participants to schedule appointments with the part-time staff and wonder which part-time chaplain will respond to a need for service. One participant mentioned that if the chaplain is not available at the time an officer is in need of someone with whom to talk, he or she will generally turn to other resources which may or may not be positive and encouraging; the response or counsel received could very well be negative or damaging. One participant saw the chaplain this way: "He is always available or made it a point to make himself available" (Moosbrugger, 2006). Another participant viewed the chaplain as being available 24 hours a day:

It is definitely beneficial to me through everything I just said prior. I mean, he puts everything aside and is always available 24 hours a day. Even though he is retired, he is still working hard at it and continues to counsel if people need counseling throughout the department (Moosbrugger, 2006).

#### *Visibility*

The participants stated that in addition to being available for counsel or offering a different perspective, the chaplain's influence is shared when time is spent with the officers. The chaplain made a point to attend social events and, on many occasions, played an important role at them such as emcee. Chaplain Elliott was intentional in building confidence and trust with department personnel by being a part of their personal and professional lives. One of the events about which participants spoke was the New Year's Day breakfast he hosted in his personal home at his expense. Many participants saw this gesture as a way to unite department personnel and their families. Not only was Chaplain Elliott visible by spending time with department personnel, he also sent them birthday cards.

Through the consistent contact and over several years of ministry, Elliott was able to connect and make a difference, a difference that has been felt in the community. One participant was conducting a youth Bible study at a local hotel. This hotel was in a deteriorating part of the community, and the youth were children of prostitutes and drug dealers. The only hope that many of these kids had was the weekly Bible study followed by pizza. This participant was inspired and encouraged by Chaplain Elliott; he was instrumental in mentoring this officer to give sacrificially to the community. This particular interview had to take place in a vehicle in the parking lot of this hotel while Chaplain Elliott conducted the Bible study due to the commitment this officer had to the youth. Over a period of time and with the influence of Chaplain Elliott, the community has become accustomed to several officers who are committed to the residents of the community, regardless of their socioeconomic status, and willing to serve whatever the costs. The Arlington Police Department also has a network of churches where many officers attend in the community where Chaplain Elliott has partnered. These churches represent many different ethnic groups, and one participant even stated that it was no surprise to see Chaplain Elliott frequent the pulpit of an African-American church despite him being Caucasian. Several participants saw the chaplain as visible for relationship building:

I always knew that he was there when we need him, and it made me feel better. He builds rapport with the officers and community. This strengthens the relationship with the community. He is always available and visible to build relationships (Moosbrugger, 2006).

#### *Adaptability*

The world of law enforcement is a very dynamic environment, and there is no such thing as routine police activity. There are many similarities, but each can have a different conclusion based on the officer's proactive activity or reaction to the situation. Chaplain Elliott has prepared his mind and heart to react consistently to every situation. Several participants stated that the chaplain does not judge them or look down on the immorality or poor decisions made. He is there as a listening ear to provide help and support. Faced with his own daughter's death by suicide, Chaplain Elliott used his experience to help other people deal with their own respective tragedies involving death. Regardless of the crime or situation, Chaplain Elliott has been ready to deal with any type of situation that occurred.

#### *Credibility*

The participants sent a clear message that the chaplain had credibility with them based on their confidence and trust in him. One executive leader participant stated that the chaplain has been accepted by the officers as one of their own. Over the course of Elliott's ministry, a trust has been built through his consistency of service and confidentiality. The participants knew the chaplain could be told anything and that it would not be told to anyone else. Participants admitted that in law enforcement agencies, everybody knows everybody's business and that what they told the chaplain was never repeated. This particular theme was prevalent through the majority of the participant interviews, even at the executive level. According to the study, Chaplain Elliott represented the position of a chaplain or

a representative of God with professionalism and care for other people; his ethics, morals, and personal convictions have never been questioned. One participant stated this about Chaplain Elliott:

For me personally, you've been in police work, once you get used to a certain person and you don't rotate them and, don't get me wrong, we build relationships and I know the two part-timers, I know them well, but I have never had conversations with them. I would never feel comfortable right now in my career having a conversation with them on the levels I have had with the chaplain. Because the chaplain was there at the beginning of my career and now I am the chief here, and he has seen me progress and mature and come from that person to what I am today, that builds credibility and that builds trust (Moosbrugger, 2006).

### *Servant Leadership*

This study has also revealed further explanation and possibilities why the chaplaincy program has been so successful. A servant leader is someone who focuses on the needs of followers and helps them to become more knowledgeable, more free, more autonomous, and more like servants themselves (Greenleaf, 1970). Participants' descriptions of the chaplain's leadership were synonymous with that of the servant leader. According to Northouse (2003), "Servant leadership values everyone's involvement in community life. Because it is within a community that one fully experiences respect, trust, and individual strength" (p. 309).

Chaplain Elliott sacrificed many hours for the good of the community and department. One participant stated the following about his willingness to give of himself and volunteer for community service:

So I think through the department, he reaches out and helps the community. And then, he does all this volunteer work, and he puts in his time there, so not only here but there too. Mission Arlington has benefited, I think, a great deal from Chaplain (Moosbrugger, 2006).

According to Patterson (2003), servant leadership involves seven constructs: agápao love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service. Chaplain Elliott has given 22 years for the agency personnel and community, demonstrating all of these constructs.

### *Agápao Love*

According to Patterson (2003), agápao love is a moral love which means to do the right thing, at the right time, for the right reason. Chaplain Elliott demonstrated this in his view of officers, loving them unconditionally. Chaplain Elliott did not judge the officers even when they were involved in immoral activities or making poor decisions. Elliott stated that he did not make moral judgments an issue when spending time with them after learning of their situations, and he treated them the same. Elliott stated the following during his interview:

You've seen something here, and I don't even know how it looks, but you've seen something here where the men and women alike, where it's a physical thing, there's hugging going on. I don't even know how that came about that. . . because when I first started here, that didn't

happen. But, along the way, it got to be where the men and women alike would come up and reach out and give you a hug. And, I am a toucher anyway and so black, white, Hispanic, male, female, ugly, pretty, smell good, smell bad, it didn't make any difference. . . I just became one of them. Yeah, I love them, still do, still do. That's why I am still here for nothing [as an unpaid volunteer] (Moosbrugger, 2006).

### *Humility*

Humility does not mean that a leader is weak or permissive; rather, it refers to how leaders view themselves (Patterson, 2003). Chaplain Elliott is willing to work with the homeless people in the streets. Elliott could be seen many times working at Mission Arlington which provides clothing and food for people who are struggling and in need. He treated each department personnel the same whether he or she was the custodial staff or the Chief of Police. Based on his own decision, Elliott avoids meeting with the executive staff so no special treatment was given; he wanted to be like anyone else and does not believe he has all the answers. One participant stated that Chaplain Elliott was able to relate to anyone:

Because he was always able to, always able to relate to everybody. I would say that even in a department our size or even ones smaller or larger departments, a lot of time, the higher echelon in leaderships in the departments are unable to do that (Moosbrugger, 2006).

### *Altruism*

Chaplain Elliott seeks the best for other people and the agency without expecting anything in return. He serves just for the sake of serving other people. He experiences joy when seeing personnel receive promotions and awards and achieve goals, especially when advice or counsel was offered and the outcome was positive. Elliott stated during his interview that an officer called him in the middle of the night from a local hospital and asked him to bring him a hamburger which he did. One participant said this about Elliott: "His disposition, his kindness and love for the officers, friendliness to the officers and their families, he's always very upbeat, keeps people in a positive mode, and keeps them laughing and loose and those kinds of things" (Moosbrugger, 2006).

### *Vision*

Vision refers to the servant leader having a vision for his or her followers, being able to see the person not for who they are today but for who they can become tomorrow (Patterson, 2003). The executive leadership of the department has credited Elliott with crafting a nationally recognized program for being effective and life changing. He has paved the way for future chaplains through careful planning of his retirement while maintaining a part-time status to assimilate a new chaplain. By pouring his life into the agency personnel, Elliott has challenged and encouraged the employees to see what their life could and can be and has built a successful program around the people and not himself. Chaplain Elliott has been credited with developing a suicidal prevention program which has benefited the community through measures of prevention and comforting the family. A participant described Elliott as preparing the way: "I think he has prepared the way for another chaplain to come in and operate successfully when he moves completely out of the picture" (Moosbrugger, 2006).

### *Trust*

Elliott provides counseling and guidance so the officers have opportunities to draw their own conclusions instead of telling officers what they should do. He trusts them to learn from their mistakes and decisions. He has been instrumental in the development of new programs and has given department personnel the responsibility of designing and implementing these programs. Chaplain Elliott allows department personnel to use a guest home freely as a place for refuge and relaxation. In addition, Elliott places his life in the hands of the officer every time he works a shift in a patrol car, respecting the officer's decisions and direction. One participant stated this about trust:

I trust Chaplain Elliott because I know him. You see him in the hallways for years, and you go to his house for New Years Day breakfast at 6:00 o'clock in the morning, and you see him at different functions, and you build up that bond and trust (Moosbrugger, 2006).

### *Empowerment*

Agency personnel have been given the responsibility for assisting and implementing programs like peer support groups and community outreach. Through Chaplain Elliott's influence and mentoring, one participant was encouraged to conduct a Bible study with a group of at-risk youth at a nearby hotel. Empowerment allows the officers to feel like they do make a difference; it promotes teamwork and fosters a creative workforce (Patterson, 2003). One participant stated that the chaplain's influence helps him be a witness:

I say this, and I am not worried about it getting out, and I wouldn't mind if the chief knew this, I would say probably in the last 3 years since working with one of my partners and also one of my best friends, I would say in the last 3 years, and I would say that a lot of it has to do with chaplain Elliott reminding us of our faith, my partner and I have witnessed to probably dozens of people in jail who we have been responsible for putting in jail. I am not just talking about burglaries but major felony cases (Moosbrugger, 2006).

### *Service*

Elliott has given his time, personal finances, and possessions so officers can sense his family's care for them. Chaplain Elliott's service to the officers was described by one participant this way:

So every program he has tried to either have his hand in it, be it the police academy, the annual New Year's breakfast, and they did it out of his money. When he and his wife themselves cooked for every officer who was working on New Year's Eve, he fed every officer. That is where they took their lunch break that night; everybody drove to the chaplain's house. And, in his own house, there were hundreds of police officers that came through, and he would do that every year and has done it every year that I can remember since he left. It came out of his money and his house (Moosbrugger, 2006).

### *Conclusion*

This study confirms that Chaplain Elliott's relationship through his service to the participants played a major role in the success of the chaplaincy program. The trust and confidence earned by

Elliott were built over many years of consistency and service. Another key part of the program's effectiveness has been the executive staff's trust and confidence in the chaplain.

Today's law enforcement officer is faced with a dynamic world of change and shifts in society which has never before been seen. Communities deserve the services of professional and productive public servants who are ready to serve when a call for assistance is required. This study suggests that chaplaincy programs provide an extra measure of assurance that the agency personnel are prepared mentally, spiritually, and physically to serve the needs of the public. When agencies or organizations are considering hiring a chaplain, this study suggests that a person modeling the servant leader would make a good candidate.

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