

## “How to Become a Police Chaplain”

By Chaplain Steve Kihlthau

You may be asking yourself the question, “How does one become a Police Chaplain”? What is necessary for one to do to become a Chaplain with the Stockton Police Department and what kind of person makes up the Stockton Police Chaplaincy? These are all extremely important questions that a person needs to ponder carefully before becoming a Police Chaplain. This is especially true because of the kind and quality of people it takes to be a Police Chaplain today and serve alongside Law Enforcement.

First a man or woman must be either ordained or licensed by their Church or Denomination to be considered as a Police Chaplain. There must also be proof of this ordination or licensing by either a certificate or letter on appropriate letterhead and signed by a duly authorized representative. This ordination or licensing ensures and enables the Chaplain to interact with officers and others with a level of confidentiality afforded to clergy. Officers and unsworn personnel along with the community must expect this level of confidentiality when speaking with a Police Chaplain. To break this confidence unless required by statute or law is unacceptable.

A person considering becoming a Police Chaplain should have three to five years of ministry experience, preferably as a Senior or Associate Pastor. The Bible speaks of a person not being a “novice” and I think this is especially true of a Police Chaplain because of the experience needed to relate to the various types of officers and people in a Police Department. Generally speaking, no amount of training can replace real life experiences in ministry.

Second a person considering serving as a Police Chaplain will need to set up a personal interview with the Senior Chaplain, Jesse Kenyon. This interview accomplishes many things but especially lays out the expectations of becoming a Police Chaplain. This interview also helps to visualize the potential of this person in being a Police Chaplain and their willingness to serve with a “team spirit” and yet under the authority of both the Senior Chaplain and their Captain. A potential Police Chaplain must know their expectations of service in writing and clearly agree to them before agreeing to being considered. Many people have wanted the prestige of “wearing a badge and uniform” but fail to fully realize the responsibilities that come with that badge and uniform. A second interview will be with a panel of three comprised of Board members and Captains.

After these interviews the individual may then be ready to submit to a personal background check provided by the Stockton Police Department. This background check is as thorough as a background check for a potential Police Officer. During the interview

mentioned above, all matters that may come up in a background check must be divulged by the potential Police Chaplain. There should be no “surprises” that occur in this process or consequences of being dropped from consideration may be necessary.

If the individual passes the background check then they could be readied for an Academy for the Chaplaincy. Since these occur normally only once a year this Academy may not happen quickly. This Police Academy is a major step but also expense in the preparation of this New Chaplain. This Police Chaplain Academy is to cover all major aspects of being a Police Chaplain and must be taught by qualified trainers equipped to prepare this potential Chaplain for the high calling of becoming a Police Chaplain. Areas related to both Patrol Chaplains and School Resource Chaplains must be taught along with exposure to the many aspects of working in a “paramilitary” organization and atmosphere. The character of the New Chaplain regarding tardiness and punctuality along with their general appearance must be evaluated early and either corrected or warnings given and if necessary early terminations. Professionalism is not an option!

Upon graduation from the weeklong Academy additional time needs to be scheduled with seasoned Chaplains in the field for the new Chaplain to learn and the longer-term Chaplain to observe and additionally train the new Chaplain much like a Field Training Officer would do with a new Police Officer. This training and experience should continue with several different current Chaplains in both School Resource training and Callouts. New Patrol Chaplains should receive and understand what is and is not acceptable behavior on a Ride-a-long. Examples would include not being too talkative or trying to push a conversation in spiritual matters with the officer on patrol. Being in a Patrol Car on a Ride-a-long is an extremely important time for the Chaplain to build relationships with officers but also fully realize that the Police Officer is in charge at all times on that Ride-a-long. The safety of both the Officer and the Chaplain are always paramount.

Continual training is a key to staying sharp as a Police Chaplain. Being teachable is a must to us all! The new Chaplain must agree to attending the monthly Chaplaincy meetings and fulfilling their time and personal commitments to remain as a Chaplain. Becoming a Police Chaplain is a privilege. If a Police Officer must agree to “Protect and Serve” then a Police Chaplain must agree to “Pray and Serve”.

If God would speak to your heart about becoming a Chaplain with the Stockton Police Department, it would be our privilege to speak further with you.