

# BEARING

## Chaplains Serving Kentucky Law Enforcement

/Article and photos by Elizabeth Thomas,  
Public Information Officer

**HUMBLE**  
Surveying the catastrophe at Ground Zero, Chaplain Mike Humble witnessed the emotional trauma of first responders as they stood amid the rubble of the collapsed twin towers when the officials made the announcement that their efforts were no longer for rescue, but for recovery.

He saw the despair in their faces; and there was not enough comfort for the crowd.

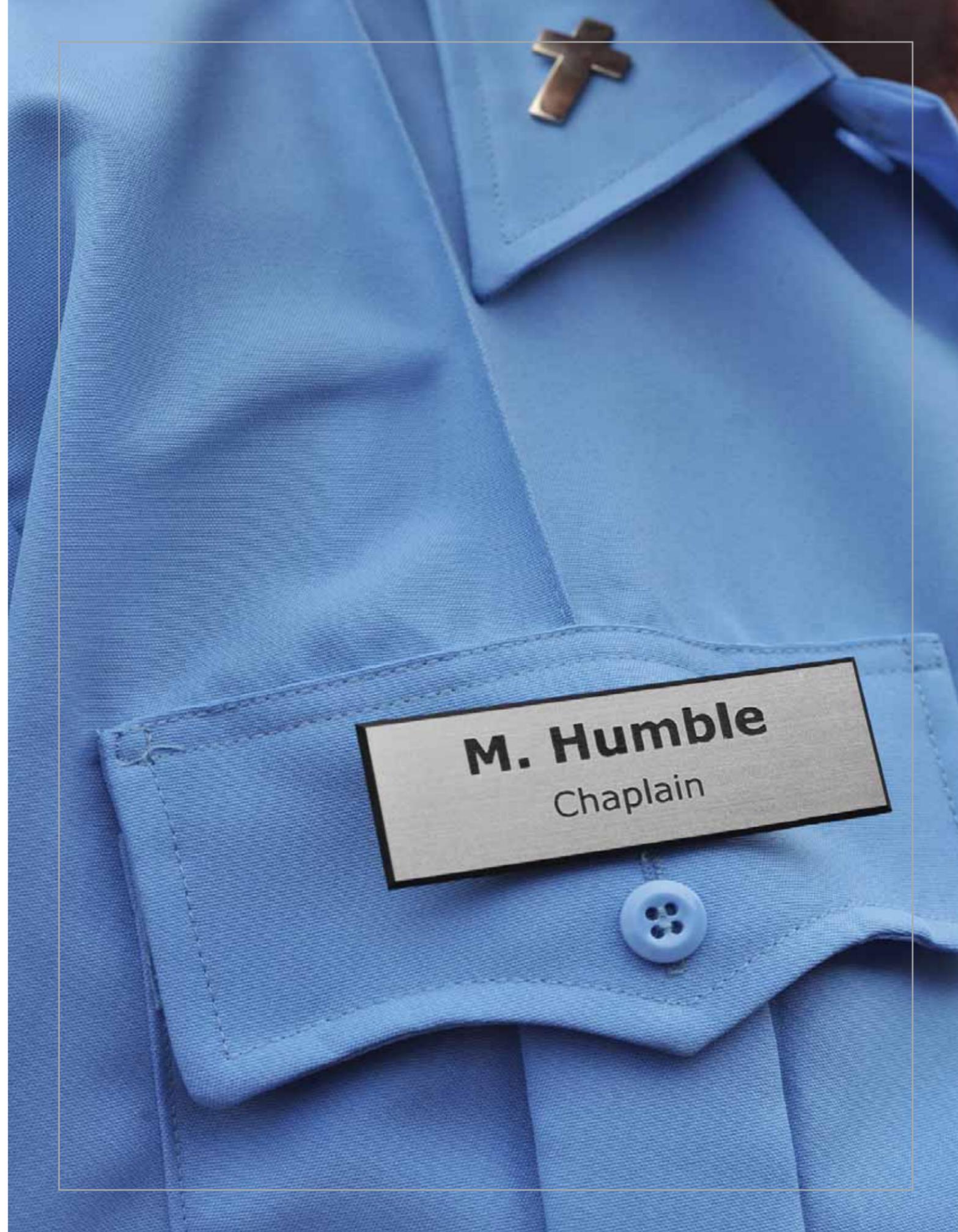
At that moment Humble realized that Kentucky's rural first responders needed comfort, too. The small towns of the commonwealth may not ever experience a disaster equal to Septem-

ber 11, 2001, but every day those towns' first responders experience crises and comfort the afflicted. But many agencies have no one to comfort the officers.

Humble, a former 20-year volunteer chaplain with the Department of Corrections, returned to Russellville with the passion to start Burden Bearers, an organization of chaplains who serve not only the local police departments and Logan County Sheriff's Office, but also local fire departments, EMTs, telecommunicators, coroners and even emergency room nurses. Burden Bearers kicked off its first cause in March 2002.

Burden Bearers is comprised of six active pastor chaplains, none of whom are sworn officers. These chaplains represent many church >>

# THE BURDEN



▼ Officer Brent Wilson, chaplain at Paris Police Department, takes every opportunity to get to know the officers at his department. Being available in any situation or just for a conversation is at the top of Wilson's priorities.

# CHAPLAIN RESOURCES

If officers are interested in starting a chaplain program at their agencies, Jerry Huffman of the Department of Criminal Justice Training encourages them to approach their agency head, whether it is the chief, sheriff or chief administrator, and explain the advantages of having a chaplaincy program.

The International Conference of Police Chaplains has compiled a list of benefits and advantages for the executive officer to review and consider.

"The hard part is convincing an agency of the benefits," Huffman said. "They're concerned about the liability of the non-sworn individual riding with officers."

According to Huffman, the benefits outweigh the liabilities.

"Having a chaplain gives the officer someone to vent to, giving the officer a clearer mind when on the streets," Huffman said.

With less stress, officers will miss work less and have less mental stress to take home, he added.

"Less stress means more safety and less liability to the agency," Huffman said.

Once officers have the support of the chief executive, Huffman stresses the importance of train-

ing as they build their program.

Training opportunities available:

1. Chaplain Basic Training Course – an eight-hour, Kentucky Law Enforcement Council-certified class taught annually at DOCJT for new chaplains.
2. Advanced Chaplains Course – a 16-hour, KLEC-certified class offered annually by DOCJT, with a new topic/theme each year.
3. DOCJT's Web site: [www.docjt.ky.gov](http://www.docjt.ky.gov) has a link to family support resources. DOCJT is developing a chaplains' directory. Huffman hopes to have the directory in a format that will allow an officer to easily locate a chaplain, even out of his region, if necessary, to remain stigma-free in his own area.
4. ICPC is the premier organization for police chaplains. Huffman encourages chaplains to join the organization, which offers a host of invaluable resources for chaplains. ICPC hosts regional chaplain training conferences throughout the nation. For more information, visit its Web site at [www.icpc4cops.org](http://www.icpc4cops.org).
5. Seek training through your denomination or religious affiliation. ■

For more information or guidance through the process, call Jerry Huffman at (859) 622-8127 or Jim McKinney at (859) 622-8130.



affiliations, but they are unified in their purpose, "Bear ye one another's burdens," as stated in Galatians 6:2.

"And we work well together. We really enjoy each other," said Jean Odum, a Methodist pastor, noting their denominational differences.

Odum joined Burden Bearers in March 2004. Her cousin worked at central dispatch and had been asked if she knew a female pastor who might be interested in their cause. She approached Odum, who prayed about it, sought wise counsel and decided to do it.

Burden Bearers is not only interdenominational, but very conscious and respectful of other faiths.

"We don't push religion on anyone," Humble said. "If we [come across someone who's] Muslim or Hindu, we're sensitive to them and try to get someone to help who's familiar with their beliefs."

Each member of the group will be on call for one week, off – but available – for four weeks, and then on backup for the on-call chaplain for a week. Obviously, Sundays can be a more difficult day to cover, but you will often find any one of them at the emergency scene, whether they are on call or not.

The most recognizable face of the group probably is that of Sam Romines, a Cumberland Presbyterian minister and Burden Bearer chaplain since its inception. Romines also is a volunteer firefighter and emergency medical technician.

Before Humble's idea to begin a chaplains team, Romines was asked by the Lewisburg fire chief if he would consider serving as fire chaplain.

He agreed.

"But, he insisted I take all the necessary training to be a volunteer firefighter, and that's how I got into it," Romines chuckled.

Romines may be among the first to arrive at an emergency scene, either as a first responder or a chaplain, rushing down the road in the once-patrol, now repurposed,

Crown Victoria. It is the official vehicle of Burden Bearers, decorated with the group's logos.

"We're fortunate enough that for an officer, just seeing us coming on the scene calms them down," Romines said.

"As soon as they see us, they point as to say, 'the family's over there,'" Humble added. "And with that, we know where we're supposed to be."

After he treats those on the scene as a first responder, Romines makes eye contact with everyone on the scene to make sure they're OK.

"You can see it in their eyes," he said.

When two chaplains are available on the scene, one works with the families and one works with the officers to ensure all involved are OK when they leave the scene.

"You often see someone that was involved in a situation you worked. They remember you and thank you for helping them," Odum said. "Sometimes, it's just from serving hot chocolate at a search-and-rescue site."

It can happen, though, in a small county like Logan where almost everyone knows everyone else, that a chaplain gets called to a scene involving someone they know, or a situation that might be more difficult for the on-call chaplain to handle.

"We know when one of us is having trouble at a scene – we back each other up and take that call," Romines added.

As she approaches a difficult situation, Odum said, "Sometimes, I think, 'I don't want to do this', but I know that's where I need to be, even if it's just serving hot chocolate – it's where the Lord wants me to be."

But, for Burden Bearers, quite often it's much more than serving hot chocolate. The chaplains stock their vehicles with bottles of water, Gatorade, stuffed animals and blankets. Their calls may range from a house fire where a family has lost everything to a lengthy, mid-summer search and rescue. They also keep the departments stocked

with water, so that plenty is available for the officers to take to an emergency scene.

Chaplains have helped in domestic violence situations to move the mothers and children to a safe location.

"Sometimes these little ones just need something to call their own, when they've lost everything, and that's where the stuffed animal comes in," Odum said.

When officers encounter a suicidal individual, they offer the person the opportunity to speak with a chaplain. Officers even request a chaplain to speak with an individual who's been arrested, Humble said, because the chaplains maintain confidentiality on issues which could be a conflict of interest for the arresting officer.

But the top priority for chaplains is to bear the burdens of the first responders. Those burdens often can lead to health issues, marital problems and even suicide.

"With a small community, you hear things, and you may know they're going through marital problems," Humble said.

Often, it's the chief or another coworker expressing concern that points the chaplain toward a particular officer or firefighter, he said.

"They're often short staffed, and when they're short staffed, we know there's pressure – pressure at home and pressure at the department," Humble added.

According to Humble, work-related stress can come from many sources – a case that comes out of the court and does not turn out the way the officer had wanted, or when the officer deals with a certain type of death scene, like that of child.

"You know you're going to talk to that officer about 'ghosts' in their life," Humble said.

Ghosts are traumatic scenes that officers and firefighters have worked that continue to re-emerge in their minds.

The chaplains also deal with officers who have served overseas. >>



"Their work may cause them to have flashbacks," said Chaplain Joe Vaught, also a pastor with Cumberland Presbyterian denomination.

Vaught remembers a call to a house fire that Romines received in which five people died and three survived. That tragic incident drew Vaught to join the cause of Burden Bearers with his fellow Presbyterian pastor.

As civilian chaplains, Humble said, Burden Bearers provides more safety and comfort for an officer who might otherwise feel uncomfortable approaching a coworker for help.

"We're strictly confidential," Humble said. "But, if they're suicidal or homicidal, we make sure they get help."

Just knowing a chaplain will be available if they ever need help can be very important for the officers. The chaplains of Burden Bearers are available beyond crisis situations, as well.

"We'll cook out for them when they have their softball games and provide them drinks," Vaught said.

When an officer's family member is in the hospital, a chaplain will visit them, even if the individual is in an out-of-town hospital, like Nashville, Vaught added.

Chaplains routinely ride along with officers while they are on duty.

"I was doing a ride-along once and we saw several officers parked and talking to each other. But, as I approached, they stopped talking. Then one of them, pointing to me, said, 'she's alright,'" Odum recalled. "That was a highlight for me. I knew I was accepted then."

Vaught added that officers are not much for public displays of affection.

"When you're in Wal-mart, and an officer comes up and gives you a great big bear hug, you know you're appreciated," he said.

Capt. Roger McDonald of Russellville Police Department was a supporter of Burden Bearers from its beginning.

"They do a great service. I'm proud every day when I see them out," he said.

## SERVANT

"In this line of work, every day can be a challenge," said Sgt. Mike Neal, chaplain at McCreary County Sheriff's Office.

Unlike most agencies, where an officer or civilian approaches the chief executive to offer their services as a chaplain, Neal was approached in 1997 by his then chief, Al Schafer of the Mt. Healthy Police Department in Ohio.

When Neal came to serve with the McCreary County Sheriff's Office in 2004, he continued his role as chaplain, perhaps as the first sworn chaplain to serve McCreary County. Neal is among the very few chaplains who are ordained and sworn.

With 17 years of professional experience, Neal understands both the ups and downs of law enforcement and the responsibility of caring for troubled officers. Neal is a school resource officer and supervises four individuals, including two sworn officers.

Approaching a chaplain who also is a supervisor might often present conflict for distressed individuals.

"I think the guys that I work with know that I keep things confidential," Neal said. "The trust factor goes a long way in building a working relationship."

► Many law enforcement chaplains keep the Police Officer Bible on hand for their own reference and comfort. Chaplains do not push their spiritual beliefs on officers but often provide spiritual guidance if an officer asks for it.

Neal is ordained as a Southern Baptist minister and has pastored full-time and part-time in many churches. He now serves as minister of missions and outreach at Whitley City First Baptist, and attends Clear Creek Bible College in Pineville.

As a school resource officer, Neal deals with students and teachers, as well as other officers.

"The death of someone they really love is probably the hardest," Neal said. "Sometimes just having someone who will listen to them and reassure them along with a shoulder to cry on, is the best care you can give them."

Neal is grateful for the capacity in which he serves.

"Every day holds a new challenge to help not only those you work with, but to help anyone to whom you may come in contact with," Neal said. "And to know you made a difference and answered that 'calling' in your life, it's not only a great responsibility, but a great honor."

## CALLED

In August 2007, Anthony Gubitz intently watched the news coverage of the case of 6-year-old murder victim Wesley Mullins. What he saw was not only the distress of the family and the community, but also the officers who were dealing with the family and the tragedy.

"You could see the emotion in their faces," Gubitz recalled. "And I wondered, 'Who do these guys have to talk to?' and that started me on this path."

A friend and member of the church Gubitz pastors, Brent Wilson, was burdened in much the same way. Wilson is an officer at the Paris Police Department.

Before joining the Paris police, Wilson worked with Kentucky Vehicle Enforcement where he was involved in a high-speed pursuit that ended in the suspect's death. Wilson was deeply troubled by the event. >>



▼ The Logan County Burden Bearer pastor chaplains, (L-R) Jean Odum, Mike Humble, Sam Romines and Joe Vaught, along with William Washington and Patrick Kerstiens (not pictured), serve with purpose and enjoy the camaraderie of their team. Humble, with Romines, started Burden Bearers in 2002 with the mission of Galatians chapter two, "Bear ye one another's burdens."



## CHAPLAINS ON THE BEAT

### Serving first responders of Logan County, Burden Bearers

Mike Humble, chaplain and founder of Burden Bearers, Agape Foundation  
 Sam Romines, Cumberland Presbyterian, volunteer firefighter, EMT  
 Jean Odum, Methodist  
 Joe Vaught, Cumberland Presbyterian  
 William Washington, Baptist  
 Patrick Kersteins, Church of Christ

### Serving McCreary County

Sgt. Mike Neal, chaplain, McCreary County Sheriff's Office

### Serving Bourbon County

Officer Brent Wilson, chaplain, Paris Police Department  
 Anthony Gubitz, New Life Ministries, chaplain, Bourbon County Sheriff's Office

### Serving Harlan County

Bill Ball, Church of God, chaplain, Harlan County Sheriff's Office

“I believe God allowed me to go through that so I can help an officer who goes through a similar situation,” Wilson said.

Not too long after that incident, Wilson transferred to his hometown police department in Paris. But while at KVE, Wilson was offered the opportunity to serve as a chaplain with the agency. Wilson then mentioned it to Gubitz, his pastor at New Life Ministries. Each took it as confirmation to proceed toward chaplaincy.

But Wilson was apprehensive. “I didn’t know how to approach it. I’m young and I didn’t think I had enough experience,” he explained.

But soon, just after Wilson went to work for Paris P.D., he was ready to pursue chaplaincy. A telecommunicator, who was a local pastor, had served as the unofficial chaplain for the department in the past. But the chief was supportive of Wilson taking the role in an official capacity.

“A big part of its success is having a chief that stands behind you and supports you,” Wilson said. “Chief Tim Gray is 100 percent behind me.”

While Wilson serves the police department, Gubitz serves with the Bourbon County Sheriff’s Office.

“We do this together,” Wilson said.

“And we’re here for each other,” Gubitz added.

“I hate to distinguish who works where, really,” Wilson said. “I spend a lot of time [at the sheriff’s office], while Anthony’s at the department a lot.”

Together they developed the policies and procedures for the chaplain programs at Bourbon County Sheriff’s Office and Paris Police Department. Gubitz is a part-time volunteer chaplain and puts in at least eight hours per month, but is available when needed.

Because the two agencies often work so closely together, Gubitz said, they included in the policies and procedures that the agencies’ chaplains would always collaborate.

Speaking of the agencies’ camaraderie, Wilson added, “If we need help, they come.”

As a pastor, Gubitz has been in the ministry for more than 20 years with a bachelor’s degree in Bible and Theology from Trinity Bible College. Also close to his heart are those on the other side of the law, inmates in prison.

Both Gubitz and Wilson have attended the Basic Chaplains Training, an eight-hour course, and the Advanced Chaplains Training, 16 hours, offered annually by the Department of Criminal Justice Training.

Gubitz said that officers are trained to enforce laws not serve as grief counselors or social workers, but often that’s what they face. He willingly bears those burdens for the officers, so they can be free to do their job.

“It’s me and 24 guys, and they’re all dealing with stuff,” Wilson said. “We need more chaplains.”

Getting officers to open up also is a challenge, and it takes time. Wilson, as a full-time officer, spends much of his time with other officers and often notices behavioral changes that indicate an officer may be dealing with personal stress.

Studies show the law enforcement suicide rate is much higher than other professions, as well as the likelihood of heart attack and divorce, Gubitz said.

“It’s a matter of getting them somewhere where they’re willing to talk,” Wilson explained. “I try to talk to the officers as much as I can. I work with them every day and I can tell when something has changed.”

Although they may not be trained in everything, Gubitz said they have resources.

“If a guy wants to talk about Jesus, I’m here for that, but if he’s going through a divorce and needs marriage counseling, I can get him help,” Wilson said.

Gubitz considers getting to know the officers the most rewarding aspect of his calling. He often can be found in the cruisers,

riding with the officers, taking any opportunity to talk with them.

“I get reward out of helping someone. If an officer needs something and I can help, that’s what I want to do,” Wilson added.

# HELP

Many chaplains find that their work goes beyond law enforcement officers, death notifications and handling individuals in crisis situations.

Harlan County Sheriff’s Office chaplain and Church of God lay speaker, Bill Ball, set out to serve the deputies of the county. But, the Chaplains Corps he started in February 2007 now reaches not only other local law enforcement, but also the hungry, the needy and the drug-afflicted in Harlan and Bell counties.

Ball has come face-to-face with the desperate economic struggles and drug abuse of his eastern Kentucky county.

“You can’t arrest your way out of this problem,” Ball said. “It’s more than handcuffs and guns – a lot more.”

As a chaplain, Ball wanted to help his community, especially those who needed change.

“It costs you much more to arrest them, jail them, let them go, take them to court and put them back in jail.” Ball said, “They need to know we care about them and we want to help them. That was the driving force behind the chaplains’ program. Jesus said, ‘feed the hungry, and if they’re naked, clothe ’em.’ And I thought that sounded like a pretty good idea.”

In August 2008, Ball and fellow volunteer chaplains started the Chaplain Outreach Project, appropriately known as COP. Every Monday and Friday, COP volunteers man a warehouse supplied with food and other necessities. Individuals in need make appointments to shop for items. >>

► McCreary County Sheriff's Sgt. Mike Neal serves as the department's chaplain and McCreary Central's school resource officer. Neal is one of only 25 chaplains in the state who is both sworn and ordained.



The COP warehouse also opens its doors every year for the Back-to-School Program, offering school children books, paper, backpacks and even greeting cards for them to give throughout the year.

According to Ball, COP has served more than 14,000 people in the region, and is one of the largest independent food warehouses in Kentucky. Volunteers for COP are not only pastors and lay people from several denominations; women from the Cumberland Hope Center, a half-way house for re-integrating drug-addicted and alcoholic women into society, volunteer regularly as do many mentally-challenged individuals from the community.

Ball finds the strength to balance the needs

of his community with Chaplains Corps' top priority – the needs of the officers he serves – by incorporating routine ride-alongs with the officers. He recognizes the challenge of making the officers feel comfortable.

"Not everybody wants someone in the ministry around them," Ball said. "It's an uphill battle for them to realize that there's a need for ministers, and we can help these officers."

"I believe it's a real confidence booster for the agency and the officers" knowing certain responsibilities are off their plates, he added.

"You can be at a drug raid at nine in the morning, talking to a little kid and giving them a teddy bear," Ball said. "Then that night, you might be at a house fire and giving

out clothes."

Kentucky's chaplains are able to effectively handle the diverse and difficult situations they face only because they know where to find their own comfort and rest.

"I have the Lord to go to... and we have each other," Paris's Wilson said of his work relationship with Gubitza.

"Prayer," McCreary County's Neal agreed. "You can't bring home the baggage."

Sharing that peace with the officers and communities that surround them is the ultimate goal and calling for the commonwealth's law enforcement chaplains. J

## \*BY THE NUMBERS

**148** KY agencies DO NOT have a chaplain program

**4** agencies have non-sworn, non-ordained chaplains

**25** agencies have sworn officer chaplains who are ordained pastors

**44** agencies have non-sworn, ordained chaplains

**9** agencies have sworn officers who serve as chaplains, but are NOT ordained pastors

\* as of DOCJT 2007 comprehensive survey





/Photo by Elizabeth Thomas

# AT THE DOORSTEP, IT CLICKS

Chaplains bear the burden of death notifications, relieving officers of a daunting duty

/Elizabeth Thomas, Public Information Officer

Among an officer's most difficult challenges is a death notification. Chaplains can take that responsibility, relieving officers of a difficult duty.

"Death notifications are tough," said Paris Officer Brent Wilson. "I don't care how many you've done or how much training you have, they're hard for the family and they're hard for the officer."

Pastor Anthony Gubitz added, "As a chaplain, you're most likely the first one sharing the moment they learn their loved one is dead. It's not easy. You don't know them and you don't know how they may respond."

He continued, "When we're at the doorstep, it clicks. They know something's wrong."

As a pastor, Gubitz most often deals with families after they have learned of their loved one's death when he's invited to be part of their ceremony or their grieving process.

"But as a chaplain, you don't have the right to be there. You make yourself part of the situation when you walk up to their door," he said.

According to Officer.com, there are few police academies that offer training in handling death notification as a part of basic training. Officers often are not prepared

for grief counseling. In small communities, quite often, they are delivering the news to familiar faces.

"I got a call that a mom had found a family member dead on the floor. It turned out to be a guy I graduated with. He'd committed suicide," Wilson recalled. "Just three weeks before, I'd had dinner with him. You never expect something like that to happen."

Training for death notifications is probably the most important part of a chaplain's job, said Sam Romines, chaplain with Logan County's Burden Bearers.

"Cell phones make it difficult," Romines said, noting the difference technology has made in death notifications. "Some people are notified before the chaplain has a chance to get to them. Some [passersby] even send photos of the scene from their phones to the family member."

Officers who may not have a chaplain available to them are encouraged to make it a priority to notify the family in person. If a family member shows up on the scene, an officer should not pass the duty off to another officer. It may be hard for the officer, reports Officer.com, but it is harder on the family member. Officers need to be sensitive. It is best for them to act as professionally and compassionately as possible.

"I've been to the morgue with a woman to identify her son and husband, and that was difficult," said Harlan County chaplain Bill Ball. The father and son were in an accident in a mine, after trespassing illegally, compounding the difficulty and the need for sensitivity in the situation.

If the family member lives out of town, an officer should contact the family member's local law enforcement to deliver the news in person. Officers should speak clearly and use plain language, said Officer.com, and try to make sure there is a friend or relative who can stay with the individual when they leave. J