



# THE COUNTY CHAPLAIN CHAT

A quarterly publication of the Erie County Fire Safety Chaplain Corps.  
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## Meet Your Chaplains



**Chaplain John Gaglione:** Father John is a retired priest of the diocese of Buffalo. He was a volunteer fire fighter with Snyder and worked as an EMT for LaSalle ambulance while attending seminary. He served as a parish priest and pastor for many years. In addition, he is an Air Force veteran, serving 25 years as chaplain for the 914 th airlift group at Niagara Falls airbase. Father Gaglione was chairman of the Buffalo EMS board and coordinator of emergency services in the Griffin administration and has served as a County Chaplain for over 15 years.



**Chaplain Dave Borowiak:** I was ordained a Catholic Priest for the Diocese of Buffalo in 1971. During my assignment in the Village of Sloan, I took my essential of firefighting and became an active Sloan Firefighter. After changing assignments, I also joined the Rescue Fire Company in Cheektowaga and the Ellwood Fire Department in Tonawanda. Eventually, I became the Pastor at St. James Parish in Depew and joined the Depew Fire Department to which I am still Active with the Hook & Ladder Company. Later I became the Pastor of St. Philip The Apostle Parish in Cheektowaga and made friends with the Southline Fire Department. After the plane crash of Flight 3407 in Clarence Center, I was invited to become a member of the Erie County Chaplain Corp, aiding firefighters while they are serving their communities and those families needing assistance. Now retired – I able to dedicate more time assisting Pastors in the Diocese when they need help in their parishes.



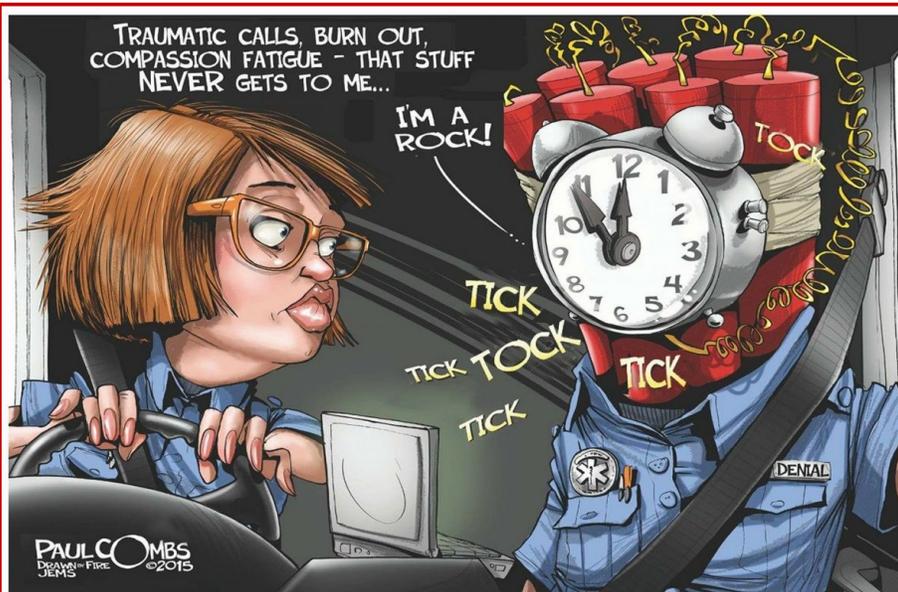
**Chaplain Steve Biegner:** Steve's been a pastor in the Lutheran Church since 1996. He served as a Lutheran Disaster Response chaplain and coordinator since 2000. His time spent at Ground Zero launched him into the fire service with no turning back. He's worked with Erie County Emergency Services as a chaplain and the critical incident stress debrief team since 2009. He serves as a pastor in Lutheran Churches in WNY and his wife Michelle runs a counseling practice in Bowmansville, where Steve does trauma counseling with first responders. You'll see Steve at calls around the County but he's always available for follow-up mental health and spiritual care after the call. You'll also see Steve at every home Bills game and many Sabres games as well. Let's Go Buffalo! He has two kids: Drew and Lauren. And a dog named Bill.



**Chaplain Galen Purpura:** Galen is currently the Pastor at St. John's Lutheran Church in Depew. He has been serving there since June of 2008. In that same year he was appointed chaplain of the Depew Police Dept. and Depew Fire Dept. In addition to his chaplaincy in Depew he was a peace officer and chaplain in Niagara County, he's a member of the Aetna Hose Co. of the Depew Fire Dept., Deputy Emergency Manager for the Village of Depew, a member of the WNY Law Enforcement Helpline, and is currently working with Lancaster Police in developing a sort of chaplain program. Galen was appointed a fire chaplain position with Erie County back in February. He has been married to his wife Jennifer for 20 years and they have 4 children.

## The Erie County Chaplains Are Here For You!

The work you do as a fire fighters in your community is an extraordinary task and yet, it isn't always easy. If you ever need a "place" please don't hesitate to reach out! The Chaplain Corps. Is here for you! We are also available to assist at your incidents! We would love to assist in any way we can! Please let **your dispatch centers know to add us to your mutual aid plans!** **The chaplains can be reached by contacting MERS control.** Happy Holidays and many blessings in the New Year!



THERE IS NO SHAME IN ADMITTING YOU'RE HUMAN.

## “Recognizing Blessings”

Rev. S. Biegner

Dear EC First Responders,

Every Christmas Eve, I drive home from the last service at St. Paul's and listen to the radio. Usually I get the updates from Gail, Tommy or others on where Santa has been last spotted. But I call in at some point to let you know that I'm praying for you and hope that your Christmas is blessed, safe and quiet. (I've learned over the years to not say "quiet" out loud because that usually backfires).

This past Christmas, of course, was far from it. It was even borderline chaotic I presume! But you were the right people for the work. Please know that I pray for your safety regularly.

In the season of Christmas we are reminded that God broke into this world and its chaos to make the sacred for us. Every moment. Every call. Every lift assist. Every moment near at that Hospice bed. Every transport. Every hose. Every fire. Every rescue. Every vehicle in the truck bay. Every laugh and argument and story that happens in the fire house.

Every moment.

Blessings as you go into the storm. Responding to the worst moments of people's lives. While even some of those worst moments happen in live time for you as well.

Thank you for putting others first and your own comfort and home second.

It is my wish for you as you begin this new year, that you allows for some brief time, a few moments, for yourself and the ones you love; a break from time to time- a break at home, over a soda in the fire house. Take some time to recognize the blessings. Not just the blessings of being able to serve the community the way you do. But more so, the blessings you have in your life, your family and your fire family.

May you be safe in the days ahead, blessed by all that God has put around you and nourished by as many moments as you can get to recognize it all! Happy New Year! and thank you for your service.

Be well, safe and blessed,

Pastor Steve - ES-14

## “Just Checking In”

Rev. G. Purpura

*“Imagine you have a car you depend on but don't take care of. You fill it with gas and drive it every day, but never change the oil, rotate the tires, or add coolant or other fluids. When the “check engine” light illuminates, you just keep driving. ...*

*“Many of us treat our minds the same way. We use them every day, fill them up with experiences (both positive and negative) but otherwise take them for granted. We actively ignore problem thoughts and behaviors, assuming they'll just go away or somehow take care of themselves. Unfortunately, like a poorly maintained car, neglecting your mental health can result in an eventual breakdown.”*



*“First responders deal with difficult situations almost every day. They see accidents, experience violence and witness some of the worst humanity has to offer. All those images, incidents and experiences can get **internalized in their minds as trauma.**” ...*

*Taken in part from an article written by: Marie Ridgeway-*

<https://www.firerescue1.com/fire-products/fitness-mental-health-wellness/articles/mental-wellness-check-ins-what-they-are-and-how-they-help-g0AuXHm44c5uDob/>

According to the full article, some departments around the country are establishing “Mental Wellness Check-in Programs” to provide an avenue for healthy response to critical incident stress; rather than internalization.

Now, a formal program may not be a realistic approach for your volunteer department. But the good news is this: It doesn't exclude all of us from participating in “Check-ins.”

Not only are we empowered to look after the wellbeing of our community members, but we too are tasked with looking after each other. It is so important for us to be checking in on **ONE ANOTHER ALL THE TIME!**

My friends, keep open conversation with one another and don't be shy to ask a fellow firefighter “how they are doing” or “if there is anything weighing heavy on them”... especially after a tough call.

What an awesome opportunity for us! And what a difference it can make!

Regular check-ins help us to respond in a healthy way to the tough experiences we are sure to encounter in our vocation as firefighters. We aren't alone in this! We've got each other! How blessed to be a blessing!

Persevere,  
Chaplain Galen Purpura.