

South Wales
Fire and Rescue Service



Gwasanaeth Tân ac Achub
De Cymru

Fire and Rescue Service Chaplaincy

Information Handbook



“*For all without
exception*”

RAISING AWARENESS - REDUCING RISK

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“For *all without*
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Huw Jakeway

Huw Jakeway
Chief Fire Officer

1. Chief's Foreword

From time to time we all need support through life's events. Sometimes we can deal with matters on our own or with the support of friends and family. At other times we need a little bit of extra support and impartiality – a listening ear who will not judge us, but who can help us bring clarity to our minds.

In the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service, we have a number of initiatives in place to help when help is needed, and our Chaplain, Paul Thomas, is one of those invaluable resources.

Whatever your problem is, and no matter if you hold any particular religious belief or not, Paul is there to help.

Give him a call if you need him.

“For *all without exception*”

2. The Fire and Rescue Service Chaplain

This booklet is designed to give an introduction and some information about the services of the Fire and Rescue Service Chaplain - a service which is available to all personnel in the Service and their families.

Chaplaincy in the Service has been around for a very long time, the first on record began in 1854, in the London Fire Brigade. With the help of the London City Mission, the then Chief Officer James Braidwood, requested that a person be made available to look after the spiritual welfare of his firefighters. From that time, Chief Fire Officers have been keen to establish this kind of support within their Services.

A Fire and Rescue Service Chaplain is an unpaid volunteer and is involved in many other ministerial and pastoral activities outside the Service. At any time, the Chaplain may be called to respond to a particular request for service.

No one needs to wait for the Chaplain's visit to the station or office. Anyone, who would like to have a talk about something that is troubling them, can contact the Chaplain by phone and arrange to meet at a mutually convenient place.



Paul Thomas
Service Chaplain

“For *all* without
exception”

3. What does a Chaplain do?



The duties of the Chaplain vary greatly, from visiting stations and offices, to being called to attend large fires or incidents (especially those where there has been loss of life), road traffic collisions and many other emergencies.

The Chaplain will endeavour to visit all stations and offices in the Service as often as possible. However due to the number of stations and the area covered by the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service, this will take some considerable time.

For the Chaplain to get to know the personnel and vice versa, there is no substitute for visiting. Being seen regularly around the place - in the

watch-room, the training ground, offices and canteens ensures that when the Chaplain is called on to render some particular service, at the very least the people know who it is they are dealing with.

The object of the many informal contacts and conversations is to build bridges and make it easy for people who want to approach the Chaplain about something that is on their mind.

It is the aim of every Chaplain to be available to all of the Service personnel including non-uniformed members of staff.

The Chaplain is there to be part of the personnel support system, and claims no exclusive rights to a cure for trauma. The Chaplain is a resource that is available, which can and should be used.

“For *all* without
exception”

4. Prayer



Occasionally someone may want the Chaplain to pray with them. At other times some Fire Service personnel derive comfort and support from knowing that they are included in the Chaplain's normal prayer life.

5. Other Pastoral Services

The Chaplain is available to visit Service personnel who may be in hospital, or in times of crisis at home. From time to time Chaplains are asked to perform other pastoral and ministerial services for members of the Service, this is perfectly natural.

With regards to such functions as weddings, baptisms, dedications and funerals, Chaplains are always careful to ensure that these services are only undertaken after appropriate consultation with parish ministers or priests whose rights and privileges in this regard will always be considered before any arrangements are finalised.

Having said this, if you have a problem or a query in connection with a wedding, baptism, dedication or funeral, by all means speak to the Chaplain who will be able to advise you about the proper course of action. Parish priests, ministers and other religious leaders are often quite happy that the Service Chaplain should be involved, but it is important to consult them before arrangements are made.

“For *all without exception*”

6. “In it, but not of it”

It is often said that the Chaplain is “in the Service but not of it”. That simply means that although the Chaplain may be seen around the station, in the canteen, the offices or wherever (and to that extent in it), the Chaplain is independent of the Service’s rank structure (and thus not of it).

Chaplains tend, naturally, to identify with the particular Fire and Rescue Service to which they are attached and may be seen on official occasions to be closely identified with it, but as the Chaplain they always retain their independence.

This is how it should be; the Chaplain is available to all, irrespective of rank. Long ago, the Fire and Rescue Service realised the value of such a role. The Chaplain is there to be a friend to all, someone who is ready to listen, to support people at every level, and in all kinds of circumstances. That is why it is important that the Chaplain stands outside the formal rank structure.

Although the Chaplain is officially appointed to a Fire and Rescue Service, there is a sense in which the Chaplain’s status is more akin to that of an invited guest. Chaplains would not wish it otherwise.



“For *all* without
exception”

7. For all without exception

When the Chaplain pays a visit to a station or office, some perhaps imagine that their real interest is first of all in the people from their own denomination. Some may also be very wary, since they don't normally go to any place of worship and may not even be particularly religious. They think that the Chaplain will try to 'ram religion down their throats' if they aren't careful! Nothing could be further from the truth.

The Chaplain is there for everybody without exception and may come from any number of religious persuasions or denomination. But as a Chaplain, will always remain neutral.

In our multi-faith society the Chaplain fully understands that there are people from other religious traditions, for example Judaism and Islam, and is sensitive to that. Chaplains are there because of their belief that people matter irrespective of who they are, what they are, or what their particular beliefs may be, whether they are church members or not.

The Chaplain is there to share concerns, interests, problems and the opportunities of Fire and Rescue Service personnel in their working lives. Above all, the Chaplain is there to make a positive contribution to the life and well-being of everyone involved.



“For *all* without
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8. Referrals

Since they are already active in ministry, Fire and Rescue Service Chaplains are aware that there are limits to the assistance that any one of them can give in a particular situation. Almost all Chaplains operate some kind of referral system whereby people who come to them for assistance can be referred to others more qualified, as and when necessary.

Such referrals however, are only done with the complete agreement of the person concerned. As has often been said, to refer someone to a third party is not a mark of failure - it's a mark of grace! Yet it cannot be over-stressed that there is complete confidentiality about the conversations with the Chaplain, and reference to anyone else will only take place by mutual agreement.



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9. Counselling

Fire and Rescue Service Chaplains often have long debates on this subject, and the reason is that to many the word 'counselling' has overtones of going to someone for 'advice' - or, worse still, being sent to someone for advice! (Or, the ultimate in horrors, someone descending on you to give you advice whether you want it or not!).

Whilst Chaplains must avoid any attempt to impose a religious view on Fire and Rescue Service personnel, they strongly believe in the ultimate value of every human being.

Spiritual counselling is as non-directive as any other kind of counselling. By 'spiritual' we mean that which is ultimately personal, relating to the deepest things in a human being, for which we know no other word than 'spirit'. It is important that the strictest confidentiality is observed by the Chaplain.

Every Firefighter is aware that any day and at any time they may find themselves face to face with a situation of extreme danger and distress. The macho image of the Firefighter, used to any and every

emergency situation, however horrific, is one that most Service personnel recognise is little more than a media myth. The reality is that we are all human, and these things can affect us at the very deepest level of our being, and because they are part and parcel of the reason why the Fire and Rescue Service exists, Service personnel especially have to find ways of coping with them.

The Chaplain is there to be part of the personnel support system. The Chaplain would claim no exclusive rights to a cure for trauma, but would claim that they are a resource that can and should be used.

If at any time there are ways in which the Chaplain's services would be of value to you in this regard, the Chaplain is at your disposal. As always, the strictest confidentiality will be observed. In fact, no one need ever know that you have spoken to the Chaplain. The basis of all the counselling which the Chaplain offers is friendship and listening, both of which demand a sensitivity to, and respect for the other person.

“For all without exception”

10. Postscript

What you have read in this pamphlet might lead you to believe that the Chaplain is solely around for the problems and difficulties, but that is only half the story. The Chaplain takes as much joy as you do in all the successes, promotions, engagements, holidays, hobbies and everyday working experiences that are also part of your life in the Service.

It is the Chaplain's privilege to be part of the Fire and Rescue Service family, and to make a contribution to the quality of its life.

11. The Chaplain is there for you



Details about your Chaplain, including a contact number can be obtained from Headquarters, Control or the station/office notice boards.

“For *all* without exception”

12. Your Chaplain's profile



Your Chaplain is Paul Thomas, he has been married to his wife Jan since 1972. He has two grown up children, and six grandchildren. Paul was an

operational Firefighter for nearly thirty four years, starting his career with Liverpool City Fire Brigade in 1968. He then transferred to Flintshire/Clwyd Brigade in North Wales and ended his operational service with the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service in 2002.

Paul completed a Theological training course whilst still in the Service and was jointly leading a church in the Cardiff area at the same time. On his retirement, he went into fulltime ministry, continuing his work in the Cardiff area and then in the Rhondda Valley. Prior to his retirement from the Fire and Rescue Service, he was invited by the Chief Fire Officer to become the Service Chaplain.

Paul currently holds the post of National Chair to the Fire and Rescue Service Chaplains' Association of Great Britain and Islands.

He is very involved in Missions ministry in Uganda and has been able to build a school in the bush, with classrooms called Cowbridge and Pontyclun - named after the fire stations that helped raise the money for their construction.

He worked with former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and his wife on the Habitat for Humanity's Work Project in Durban South Africa, building homes for the homeless and with the Operation Christmas Child Charity in Albania.

Paul also worked with the British Red Cross; he re-launched their Fire and Emergency Support Unit and also established five Emergency Response Teams, who assist in major emergencies throughout the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service Area.

His latest project was the building and opening of a home for orphaned and abandoned children called Tŷ Cariad in Uganda and founding its U.K. registered charity 'Tŷ Cariad Africa'. This work is ongoing.

Paul is Chaplain to all members of the Service, without exception uniformed, non-uniformed, retired members, including their immediate and extended families.

You can contact Paul by email at p-thomas@southwales-fire.gov.uk by telephone on 01239 654981 or 07812 126437