

Emergency Chaplains

OCTOBER 2025



Called Out of Comfort, Sent Into Crisis: Our 17-Year Journey

By: Ralph Thompson, Executive Director

A little over seventeen years ago, in 2008, Carter and I answered God's call to start Emergency Chaplains. It was a leap of faith. We had no guarantees and no way of knowing where the journey would lead, only a conviction that God was asking us to leave our comfort zone and walk with first responders in Durham County.



What began in Durham County with a handful of chaplains has grown into a network that reaches across multiple counties. What started as a local vision has become *Vision 100* — a statewide initiative to establish durable, gospel-focused chaplain ministries in all 100 counties of North Carolina.

In those first months, we found ourselves serving alongside Bethesda Fire & Rescue, Durham County EMS, and NC Highway Patrol. Our heart was to provide pastoral care and biblical counseling for responders and their families, while also standing beside them to comfort citizens in crisis. Even then, God gave us a bigger vision — to see chaplains providing round-the-clock coverage in Durham and one day spreading this ministry into every county in North Carolina.

Seventeen years later, the mission has not changed.

Then and Now

In 2008 we put it this way:

- *For Public Safety personnel and their families:* provide pastoral care and counseling.
- *For the general public:* provide on-the-scene pastoral care and crisis intervention with Fire, EMS, and Law Enforcement.
- *For other chaplains:* provide training and assistance to replicate this ministry.

That three-fold mission remains the backbone of Emergency Chaplains. Today our chaplains continue to serve side-by-side with first responders, standing in the gap for families in their worst moments, and multiplying workers through training and certification.

Why This Matters

If you talk with a first responder today, most will tell you their job has never been harder. Agencies are short-staffed, vacancies remain high, and fewer young people are stepping forward to serve. The weight of the work is taking a toll.

For those who do serve, long shifts and unpredictable schedules often make church involvement difficult. Some believers drift from their walk with the Lord. Many others—especially among the younger generation—have never been introduced to Christ at all.

That is why chaplaincy matters. It is a mission field hidden in plain sight. Our chaplains enter moments when hearts are most open—(OVER)—

17th Anniversary Banquet Thursday Evening, October 23rd

Ridgecrest Baptist Church | Durham, NC

Seating is limited—Reserve your tickets today!
Tickets: \$25 each

- ◆ 6:00pm— Meet and Mingle with the chaplains
- ◆ 6:30pm— Catered Dinner by Gillis BBQ
- ◆ 7:15pm— Banquet Program and Awards

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EChap.org/banquet

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—at the scene of a death, in the aftermath of a tragedy, or in the quiet conversation during a ride-along. Presence, prayer, counsel, and compassion open the door for gospel conversations. Every crisis call, every station visit, and every relationship is cultivated for the sake of the gospel.

Stories from the Field

In 2024, our Crisis Response Team in Durham alone was called to **573 scenes**. That means 573 times first responders reached out and asked us to come alongside them.

Each of those calls represents real people:

- A family standing in the street after a house fire.
- A teenager who lost a parent without warning.
- A woman overwhelmed by a panic attack who simply needed someone to pray with her.

When chaplains show up, they care for the family—and the responders are watching. They see the ministry in action. Over time, chaplains become trusted members of the team, opening the door for deeper conversations about faith and life with the first responders they serve.

Where We're Headed

Seventeen years later, the dream has only grown bigger. *Vision 100* is no longer just a “big, hairy, audacious goal.” It is a roadmap. We are reaching out to churches across North Carolina, urging them to step up and help multiply chaplains. Every church has the opportunity to identify prospects, support them in training, and send them into public safety agencies as gospel witnesses.

At the same time, the need is outpacing our capacity. That is why we are strengthening our infrastructure — staff support, training, and systems — all with one aim: to multiply chaplains. Because more chaplains means more families cared for, more first responders reached, and more gospel conversations where they are needed most.

How You Can Help

This October marks our **17th Anniversary Banquet**, and we want you to be there. It's our one major annual gathering where we celebrate what God has done, share the vision for the future, and invite others to join us in the mission.

Here's how you can help:

Come to the Banquet. Bring your spouse, your friends, or someone from your church who has never heard about Emergency Chaplains. It's the best way to see the ministry firsthand and be introduced to the vision.

Give generously. Your support allows us to train new chaplains, respond to more crisis calls, and expand the reach of Vision 100. Every gift matters—whether one-time or monthly, whether \$100 or \$100,000.

Consider serving. Have you ever thought about becoming a chaplain? We provide training and certification. You don't need to be a pastor—you simply need a heart for the gospel and a willingness to walk with people through their darkest moments. Pray about whether God might be calling you to step into this work.

Seventeen Years — and Counting

Looking back, it's clear that God has been faithful. From the moment we filed the paperwork in 2008 until today, the mission has never changed:

- To serve public safety personnel and their families.
- To serve citizens in crisis.
- To multiply chaplains for the sake of the gospel.

As we enter our 18th year, we celebrate what God has done and look with anticipation to what lies ahead. We invite you to celebrate with us, to invest in this mission, and to help ensure that no first responder and no family in crisis ever has to stand alone.

Hope to see you at the banquet!

Chaplain Ralph

BECOME A CHAPLAIN

The need is growing.
We can provide the training.
Sign up today!
EChap.org/training

GIVE MONTHLY TO ECHAP

Your support keeps us on the field to serve First Responders and citizens in crisis.
EChap.org/donate

JOIN THE ECHAP PRAYER TEAM

Pray for our
First Responders, Public Safety Agencies,
and our Chaplains.
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