

Chaplain notes mental health hardships first responders face

September 14, 2020

STAMFORD, Conn. (BP)—Chaplain John Revell says first responders and police have “a front row seat to depravity.”

Revell, president of Life Line Chaplaincy in Stamford, about 40 miles north of New York City, said the horrors experienced by first responders on a daily basis have deep impacts on the heart, soul and mind. Combine that with the difficult social landscape brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, and Revell said he has observed an uptick in attempted suicides and suicide ideation in the community that in turn places a heavy burden on those answering 911 calls.

A June CDC study on “mental health, substance use and suicide ideation” showed 40 percent of adults surveyed have dealt with increased mental hardships during the pandemic, and 11 percent reported seriously considering suicide.

“There seems to be an increased level of despair and depression that has led to what seems to be an increase in suicide attempts,” Revell said.

Revell has not seen an increase in suicide attempts among first responders in his particular community, but rather an increase in the need for his presence as a chaplain to walk through life with these individuals as they process the difficult situations they are dealing with, he added.

Revell, former pastor of Stamford Baptist Church and a former employee of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, said listening to and praying with those on the front lines is what drew him into chaplaincy full time.

“The role of a chaplain isn’t to preach and isn’t to try and get the first responders to go to church services,” he said. “It’s to demonstrate tangible compassion and caring. Sometimes that definitely opens the door to sharing the gospel, but the primary role of a chaplain is to be there to care. And so, my role during the most intense portion of the last few months has just been to be available.”

Revell recounted one particular series of conversations he had with a law enforcement officer who had been assigned to a child pornography case. The process of dealing with the graphic content devastated him and deeply disturbed his heart.

But he was able to pour his pain out to Revell, and eventually God used the experience to bring him to faith in Jesus, restoring his mind and soul. The man told Revell: “If it weren’t for you, I wouldn’t be here,” and has gone on to publicly share his testimony on many occasions.

The honest conversations that comprise Revell’s debriefs with first responders have been the biggest indicator that now is a time where mental health struggles, often leading to suicide ideation, have increased, and thus the care and compassion of chaplains is vital, he observed.