



## March 2026



## Bizarre and Right

**“Bizarre, right?”**

**That was a text I received from Chaplain Josh Deese about a week ago as we confirmed the final details of our transition.**

**“Bizarre AND right!” was my reply.**

**It is bizarre that this season of my life is coming to a close.**

**Since the mid-1980s I’ve been involved in emergency services. First as a volunteer FF/EMT, and then, since the mid-1990s, as a chaplain. If you do that math that equals up to ... a long time! I certainly had no idea when I started all those years ago that this is where God would lead.**

**The chaplaincy has given me the privilege of taking my faith into the real world. Faith that celebrates success and mourns**

**loss. Faith that is joy-filled at weddings and sorrow-filled at funerals. Faith that is as real during a 9:00am new hire ceremony as at a 2:00am motor vehicle fatality.**

**And the beauty of this faith is that it works. It works to provide hope and peace. It works to give life meaning and purpose. And while my faith doesn't give me all the answers, it puts me in relationship with the One who has them.**

**Depending on the setting, I often refer to this faith generically. When I teach crisis intervention I speak broadly of spirituality. But you need to know without a doubt that the faith I speak of is faith in Jesus Christ.**

**Through the years I have often been asked this question: "Who does the chaplain turn to?" I can tell you with absolute certainty that my faith in Jesus is what has sustained me.**

**The work that I've been called to has never been done on my own. Let me offer my thanks to several, though there are many more.**

**To my pastor, Ron Sylvia – thank you for permission in the early days to take time away from church to spend with firefighters. Thanks for believing in and supporting me through all these years.**

**To Chief Bobby Ramage – it was your shoulders I was able to stand on from the very beginning. It was your reputation and respect that I was able to leverage to enter the fire service in Marion County.**

**To all the chiefs I've served under with the County, the City and The Villages – thank you for your commitment to the wellness of your people and caring for their souls through the chaplaincy.**

**To the chaplains who have served with me – Tom, Danny, two Joshes, two Pauls, Alexis, and Bob – we truly have been better together. Thank you for standing in the gap for me and our firefighters.**

**To Chief Banta – it has been during our years together that all our programs, policies, and procedures were truly put to the**

**test. Through seasons of being overwhelmed and heartbroken, our faith and belief in what we were doing prevailed.**

**To my fire family – you welcomed me and trusted me – gifts many never receive. Working with you has given me a tremendous sense of purpose and has been the greatest honor of my life.**

**To my wife – you believed in me when I doubted myself; you were there for me when I returned home after every bad call; you have been my number one fan. I love you.**

**Bizarre AND right!**

**It truly is bizarre that this season is coming to a close, but it is definitely right!**

**Right, because now I will be able to leverage my experiences here to help other agencies start and develop their chaplaincy programs. I will be able to maximize my role with the Florida Firefighter Safety and Health Collaborative to advocate for wellness, especially spiritual wellness.**

**But as I move on to what's next, let me leave you with this. In fact, if you don't remember anything else about my time with you, remember this – even rescuers need to be rescued.**

**“Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue. Be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me.” Psalm 31:2**

**These are the words of King David of Old Testament fame. He was a man's man, a warrior with no equal. Many of David's life experiences are recorded in the Psalms.**

**We read of the intensity with which he fought his foes in Psalm 18:37-38: “I pursued my enemies and overtook them; I did not turn back till they were destroyed. I crushed them so that they could not rise; they fell beneath my feet.”**

**We read of the comfort he found in Psalm 23:1-3: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul.”**

**And we read that this hero turned toward heaven when he was in need in Psalm 31:2: “Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me.”**

**I believe there is One greater than us Who is watching over us. He’s the One I pray to every day asking Him to keep you safe. He’s the One that brings skill to your hands. He’s the One that gives wisdom to your minds.**

**And He’s the One you can turn to; the One that rescues heroes.**

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### **Chaplain Josh Deese**

**Josh started working full-time with Fire Rescue Support on February 23. He will provide 24/7 care to Marion County Fire Rescue.**

**Josh grew up in Marion County and as a senior in high school he attended the Marion County Fire Rescue Career Academy. He started full time with MCFR as a Firefighter/EMT in February of 2009. Josh then went on to paramedic school in 2010 and worked as a Firefighter/Paramedic assigned to the Hazmat station.**

**In 2016 Josh left the fire department to pursue a ministry opportunity in Kansas City, Missouri. He never thought he would leave, but he knew that God was drawing him to this opportunity, and he wanted to be obedient. Josh moved back to Florida in 2020, to help in ministry at a church here in Ocala, and he immediately began thinking of ways he could get involved with the fire department again. He started serving as a chaplain part-time in May 2023.**

**Working as a chaplain, Josh is living out his dream in the best way: sharing hope and encouragement with the people that he respects and admires most.**

**Josh has been married to his wife Courtney since 2010 and they have 6 amazing children.**

## Upcoming Events

# ESSENTIALS OF FIRE CHAPLAINCY

MARCH 24<sup>TH</sup> AND 25<sup>TH</sup>, 2026

8:30-5:00

## CLEARWATER FIRE & RESCUE

Clearwater Fire & Rescue  
Training Center  
1716 North Belcher Rd.  
Clearwater, FL 33765



- Essentials of Fire Chaplaincy is a two-day course designed to serve as a "Survey of Fire Chaplaincy". It is appropriate for new Chaplains, experienced Chaplains, and those who just want to learn what Fire Chaplaincy is all about. The course includes classes in ministry to Firefighters, Ministry to People in Crisis, Managing Stress, Fire Department Funerals, Fire Chaplain Operations, and many others.

### TOPICS INCLUDE:

- Chaplaincy Foundations
- Ministry to Firefighters, Ministry to people in Crisis
- FD Funerals
- Fire Department Chaplain Operations
- Helping Firefighters manage stress & more!

#### REGISTRATION

\$250

Includes all materials

Request your registration form at:  
[s.milton48@yahoo.com](mailto:s.milton48@yahoo.com)

LEAD INSTRUCTOR  
& HOST CHAPLAIN:  
CHAPLAIN MILTON SMITH  
727-798-5718



#### HOTEL

#### Roadway Inn

21252 US Highway 19N  
Clearwater, FL 33765  
727-451-8900

Code: Fire Chaplains

**Click the graphic for conference information and registration**

# FLORIDA FIREFIGHTER SAFETY & HEALTH COLLABORATIVE

## WEST CENTRAL FLORIDA REGIONAL CHAPLAINCY MEETING

 Tuesday, March 31<sup>ST</sup>, 2026

 10:30AM to 1:00PM

 Bayside Community Church  
9505 Moccasin Wallow Road  
Parrish, FL 34219

### INCLUDED

Lunch: Provided at noon

## WEST CENTRAL FLORIDA REGIONAL CHAPLAINCY COORDINATORS

Chaplain Milton Smith  
Chaplain Murphy Hanley



## Florida Fire Chaplains Conference



April 27-29, 2026  
Ocala, FL

*Click the graphic for conference information and registration*

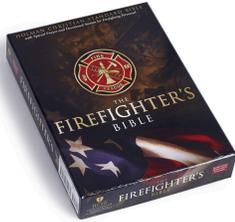
## Website Resources

Have you ever been to the Resources page on our website?  
Click on the image to the right to find help with stress

management, spiritual growth,  
marriage, and parenting.



*Click image for more information*



*Click image for more  
information*

## **Faith in the Fire**

**Chaplain Joe LaCognata shares about  
some of the unique challenges  
faced while trying to live out faith in the  
fire service.**



***Each month, in an effort to continue to promote the  
conversation about critical incident stress management, we'll  
discuss a topic relative to crisis intervention. This will be  
helpful as a refresher to those who have already been trained,  
as well as something to create interest among those who have  
not.***

## **Muscle Relaxation**

**The ICISF model of critical incident stress management is based upon the philosophy that the crisis interventionist can offer direct assistance to the person in crisis. Called “mechanisms of action,” these tools help foster the return to adaptive functioning. Some of these tools fall under the category of stress management techniques including mindfulness, controlled breathing, and muscle relaxation.**

**Here's a link** to a WebMD article that describes the process of muscle relaxation. Put this to practice and see if you are not able to reduce your level of stress.

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### **Upcoming CISM Training**

**May 19-21, 2026  
Naples, FL**

**June 23-25, 2026  
Wesley Chapel, FL**

**Sep 21-Oct 1, 2026  
Windermere, FL**

**October 13-15, 2026  
St. Petersburg, FL**

**Contact us to host training at your agency**

**[Click here for more information and to register](#)**

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## **Stress Management Information**

**Click the logo for information on how to better manage your stress.**

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## **In Remembrance**

**The following firefighters died in the line of duty in the month of February**

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**2/4 - Battalion Fire Chief Keith T. Long - Washington, DC**

**2/5 - Firefighter Howard Bennett - Camden, NJ**

**2/10 - Firefighter/Safety Officer Dale Malone - Louisburg, NC**

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**4 firefighters have died in the line of duty in 2026**

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## **Our Vision**

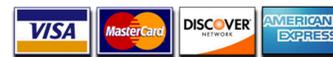
**Imagine an organization committed to one task – supporting fire rescue personnel. From their work in the field to their lives at home, picture an organization working to equip these first responders to be more successful on the job and in life.**

**Envision an organization that extends the support of those serving in fire rescue by offering care and comfort to the people they serve. Finally, picture an organization that would impact emergency services workers all across the country. That organization is Fire Rescue Support – supporting fire rescue personnel before, during and after the call.**

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## **Donate Today**

**As a non-profit organization, Fire Rescue Support operates thanks to the generosity of individuals, churches and other organizations. You can give online by clicking the PayPal logo.**



## **Round Up at Walmart**

**You can help Fire Rescue Support every time you shop at Walmart. Choose our organization and round up your purchase. Click on the image and search for Fire Rescue Support.**



**FIRE RESCUE  
SUPPORT INC**

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 **Round up**

Support your favorite local charity every time you shop.

Donate your change by automatically rounding up your orders to the nearest dollar at checkout.

**© 2026 Fire Rescue Support | 12647 SE 102nd Avenue Belleview, FL 34420**

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