

Profile: Chaplain Frank Stephens – A ministry of one, multiplied by many

For over three years, Chaplain Frank Stephens has been a familiar face with the Virginia Beach Police Department (VBPD). Now, he's extending his calling to serve deputies at the Virginia Beach Sheriff's Office, offering not only prayer and guidance, but also a confidential ear in a demanding line of work.

Stephens first approached Sheriff Rocky Holcomb several months ago with a simple but heartfelt offer: "You don't have a chaplain — I'd like to do this."

The offer was too good to pass up. Plus, deputies at the Virginia Beach Courthouse already knew Stephens, who has served as a security screener since June 2024 and as the VBPD Chaplain at the Law Enforcement Training Academy (LETA) since 2022.

"The area I don't have much exposure to yet is the correctional teams," Stephens explained, but "Lt. (Ryan) Velazquez has brought me into the Peer Support Group."

A life rooted in service

Born in Philadelphia, Stephens grew up in a Navy family, moving often. He eventually graduated from high school and joined the Air Force. He left the Air Force to attend college, receiving his bachelor's degree in marketing and international business from the University of Washington. After college, he returned to military life with the U.S. Marine Corps. For 20 years, Stephens flew F-4 Phantoms. He retired in 1990.

Along the way, he continued to pursue academics as seriously as service, earning his master's degree in human resource management from George Mason University and his Bible degree from Charis Bible College in Woodland Park, Colorado.

Raised in a large Italian Catholic family, Stephens' spiritual journey moved from Catholicism to Baptist and, ultimately, to a non-denominational ministry.

"My ministry is really to all faiths," he said. "I respond to people where they're at in that moment."

Family and career

After leaving the military, Stephens worked as a director and vice president of human resources before turning full-time to ministry. His final duty assignment brought him to Hampton Roads, a region his late wife, who hailed from California, quickly grew to love.

They raised three sons — today, one is a firefighter in Seattle, one owns an asbestos business there, and the youngest is an attorney in Norfolk. Between them, Stephens has five grandchildren.

When his wife passed away from cancer after 42 years of marriage, Stephens leaned into his calling as a man of God, including the difficult duty as a patrol chaplain delivering death notifications with grace and compassion, offering comfort in the most difficult moments of people's lives.

“Every day I get a chance to love on somebody, every day I get a chance to say something nice to somebody,” he reflected.

Called to law enforcement

Five years ago, Stephens felt strongly that God wanted him serving alongside law enforcement, though he wasn't sure what that would look like. He entered the VBPD chaplain academy, worked at the Third Precinct, and then with the VBPD at LETA. Soon, he was embedded deeply in the life of the department — riding alongside officers, experiencing the academy's stress points firsthand and becoming a trusted resource. While at LETA, he opened his arms of faith to VBSO's training deputies and to deputy recruits, addressing each new Basic Academy class before they embarked on what would be 17 of the hardest weeks of their lives.

“I see my role as ministering to the person standing in front of me,” he said. “That's a ministry of one, multiplied by many.”

Holcomb said he is proud to have Stephens in the fold.

“Law enforcement is a demanding profession, and our deputies carry a heavy burden every day. Having a chaplain like Frank Stephens means our people have someone they can turn to for guidance, encouragement and compassion in total confidence,” said Holcomb. “His service, both to our country and now to our deputies, shows his heart for others. We're proud to have him as part of the VBSO family, ministering to the men and women who serve our community.”

Ministry in action

Whether in the courthouse, the jail or the academy, Stephens' work is defined by quiet constancy. Almost every day, he prays with a deputy, listens to a story or simply offers encouragement. Everything is confidential.

“You’d be amazed at what these deputies have been through,” he said. “So much goes back to childhood, to college, to family. I want to be a confidential resource for every member of the department.”

He doesn’t limit himself to sworn staff or Corrections.

“I would never say no to any area where the department feels I could help,” he explained.

Contact and commitment

Stephens can be reached at fdstephens@cox.net or by text at 757-362-7009. He works as a security screener five days a week, but his chaplain duties have no office hours. He is available to any deputy or staff member when help or a listening ear is needed.

Stephens is also hosting a Bible study class starting Oct. 11, at 8 a.m., at London Bridge Baptist Church, 2460 Potters Road, open to both law enforcement, civilians and their families.

His mission is simple: “We’re a better place because we’re willing to show people who we are. I want to serve each person in front of me to the best of my abilities. I am a confidential resource for every member of the department.”