



# SEEKING EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

## Chaplains Play Role in Workplace Counseling

By Jonathan Wales

**W**ellness programs are growing in popularity as a way to help reduce rising health care costs. Some companies are moving beyond the physical well-being of employees, recognizing that the spiritual and emotional health of employees is a vital part of the equation. An increasing number of organizations are relying on chaplains to help meet these needs. Gil Stricklin is in the business of supplying those chaplains.

Stricklin, a kindly Texas gentleman, has been a rail yard worker, Air Force officer, theologian, Army chaplain (rising to the rank of colonel) and special assistant to evangelist Billy Graham. Starting Marketplace Ministries in 1984 and growing it to supply chaplains for 266 companies has earned him an informal title of “chaplain to American business.” Stricklin is officially known as president and CEO of Marketplace Chaplains USA, based in Dallas.

“The U.S. military is the largest employer so chaplains have already been in the workplace for 235 years,” Stricklin notes. Twenty-two years as an Army chaplain caused him to wonder why corporations weren’t benefiting from the Army’s model.

Stricklin describes his program as “supplying a DH or designated helper. In other words, there is someone there who doesn’t have to worry about corporate accounting or the bottom line; he is just there to help.” He also notes that “... chaplains like to bring our favorite four letter words to the workplace: care, help, hope and love.”

As with any staffing decision, finding the best chaplains for a particular organization is important. Stricklin suggests that chaplains have both secular and theological training and plenty of experience in ministry, business or preferably both. “If we can’t find qualified chaplains (for a requesting company) we will delay going into that company,” Stricklin stresses. “You only get one chance to do it right.”

Marketplace Chaplains reports that 50-75% of employees or their families utilize the chaplains provided by their companies. This compares to a 2-8% usage rate for traditional employee assistance programs.

### Chaplains in Indiana

American Senior Communities (ASC) operates 40 senior citizen living facilities throughout Indiana. The company employs more than 11,000 Hoosiers and began providing the services of Marketplace Chaplains to those workers five years ago.

Wayne Grumbling and Linda Geloff are two of the 11 chaplains assigned to ASC’s Indiana locations. Grumbling



### Blending Work and Personal Lives

(a three-part series)

- March-April – battling domestic violence
- May-June – chaplains in the workplace
- July-August – caregiving challenges





Employees (as well as residents) at American Senior Communities have a friendly person they can talk with. Marcy Snow (at right in the left photo) is the area team leader, with Wayne Grumbling (at left in the center photo) and Linda Geloff (at right in the right photo) serving as chaplains.

and Geloff come from different backgrounds – he from ministry and she still working part-time as a bank teller, but their shared passion for helping others makes for a powerful team. They were there last July when a female employee's daughter was involved in a car accident that killed her best friend and left the daughter in an out-of-state hospital with head trauma.

Geloff, in particular, was able to counsel and help with logistics for the worker who wanted nothing more than to be at her child's side. Injuries from the accident have required numerous follow-up surgeries and lengthy hospital stays, in addition to counseling for both the employee and her daughter. Geloff has been there with the blessing of ASC every step of the way.

The employee recalls, "I've called her (Geloff) at home to talk and cry as my daughter has memory issues. I don't know what I would have done without her."

Serious issues like the one described above are not uncommon in a company of ASC's size. Still, the chaplains are quick to explain that much of what they do involves helping people deal with the day-to-day crises of life.

"It's often just a matter of encouraging them and affirming what they do. Letting them know we won't give up on them and God won't either. A lot of nudging and smiling and encouraging," Grumbling reports.

"We do a lot more listening than talking," adds Marcy Snow, area team leader for Marketplace Chaplains, who supervises the chaplains at ASC.

All of the chaplains at ASC, Snow included, make regular rounds at the various facilities. The job would not be possible without relationship building. Making employees aware of their presence is key.

Nine Indiana companies,

including ASC, have contracted with Marketplace Chaplains. They range in location from Salem in the southern part of the state to Hammond and Elkhart in the north with several communities in between.

### Religion is not the issue

Determining what role personal beliefs should play in their work has been a challenge for chaplains over the years.

"It doesn't matter what nationality or religion you are, we can relate and help no matter what," Geloff assures.

"I wouldn't be ministering without a calling from God. It (personal faith) doesn't determine who we minister to but why," Grumbling explains. "Our faith is why we go, but I don't go offering me."

Both chaplains report being open and practicing full disclosure about their Christian faith. They are, however, willing to find employees help from representatives of other faiths if such a request is made.



ASC's Rosegate senior living community in Indianapolis is one of many operations throughout the state.

### From the top down

Successful programs must include a high degree of understanding between chaplains and the senior management team.

Dan Benson, ASC chief operating officer, is often asked why, from a business perspective, the company devotes resources to chaplains. The social responsibility reasons are powerful, but Benson is equally comfortable in justifying the move on fiscal merits.

"People who make the best employees are those who operate out of an emotional and spiritual wholeness," he suggests. "We look at the power that can be unleashed by taking care of the emotional and spiritual side of an employee."

Some suggest that spiritual services are best provided by churches or other community groups. You won't find ASC

### Marketplace Chaplains

- Founded:** 1984
- Growth rate:** One new company signing up for chaplain services every seven days
- Reach:** Chaplains in 626 cities in 41 states
- Largest company served:** 56,000 employees
- Smallest company served:** Six employees
- Number of full-time chaplains (based on hours):** 490
- Total number of chaplains:** More than 1,600



arguing that point as the more practical question for its workers is often one of access. "When you do demographics on frontline workers, you see many are single mothers doing whatever they can to survive. They can now (with chaplains) receive services that they don't have time or energy to find in the community," Benson explains.

The chaplains understand ASC's need to make efficient use of employees' time and they follow certain standards when counseling during working hours.

"They are here to work, so we don't want them to spend six hours in a counseling session. But there are opportunities throughout the day when they can slip away and see the chaplain," Benson explains. When the issue is more serious, more time is allowed for the chaplains to fulfill their role.

Grumbling confirms, "One time there was a death in an employee's family and a manager pulled me aside and said, 'talk to him as long as you need.'"

### A system built on trust

Employee trust is perhaps the most vital aspect of any chaplain program. Management and the chaplains both relay that employee reactions to ASC's program and the chaplains



**Dan Benson, COO of American Senior Communities, discusses the importance of helping meet employees' emotional and spiritual needs.**

are very positive overall.

"They can warm up at their own speed, but I have never had a negative response," Grumbling claims. "We make it clear that we're not required, we're available."

Geloff adds, "A lot of times when they find out what we do, it will bring out something they need."

As with any form of employee assistance, anonymity must be assured. ASC management receives basic reports of what the chaplains are doing but not names or specifics about a situation. According to ASC, supervisors are not privy to this information either.

Benson encourages businesses that are considering a chaplaincy program to give it a shot and see what return is produced. "We tend to measure success on what's easy to measure – dollars and cents – and tend

to overlook our impact on society as a whole. I would challenge a business to look at what they can do. Sometimes the greatest opportunity to do good is within our own organizations."

#### INFORMATION LINK

**Resources:** Gil Stricklin, CEO of Marketplace Chaplains, at (972) 385-7657 or [www.mchapusa.com](http://www.mchapusa.com)

Marcy Snow, area team leader for Marketplace Chaplains, at (317) 441-9854

Dan Benson, American Senior Communities, at (317) 889-0100

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