

A force of faith

Richland County Sheriff's Department Chaplains play key role within the department and throughout the community

COLUMBIA, SC, UNITED STATES, February 12, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Richland County Sheriff's Department (RCSD) has for decades maintained a viable corps of chaplains, officially the RCSD Chaplaincy Program (spiritual caregivers who serve the needs of those within the department): Primarily and for most of its history Christian clergymen and those working as professional ministry leaders.

In 2026, RCSD chaplains include men and women from all faiths – Christians (both Protestants and Catholics), Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims speaking a variety of languages and all serving the spiritual needs of RCSD deputies and those whom the deputies serve.

For years, the Chaplaincy Program was under RCSD's Victim Services Unit, but when RCSD's Wellness and Resiliency Unit (today the RCSD Wellness Unit) was created to serve the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs of all deputies and employees; chaplains were brought under Professional Development where "Wellness" resides, all of which is commanded by Deputy Chief Maria Yturria.

"Our Chaplaincy Program is a dynamic and, in many ways, unique element within the department," says Chief Yturria. "Dynamic in the sense that our chaplains do much more than serve the spiritual needs of others. Their outreach extends to the tangible needs of the deputies and babies born into the RCSD family."



Sheriff Leon Lott, Chief Maria Yturria, Chaplain Marty Wells, and Chaplain Bryan Walker



RCSD fields approximately 34 chaplains representing all faiths, and they are all unpaid volunteers.

For instance, RCSD chaplains operate a food pantry for deputies. Chaplains also visit all newborn babies born to RCSD parents and present those families with welcome baskets including information on how to care for your baby.

“We’re unique in that most agencies have non-denominational chaplains, we have chaplains of all faiths,” says Yturria. “The deputies also see our chaplains at all events and at the gyms where we work out. So they are training with us.”



A group of RCSD chaplains are pictured in front of the department's Denny Terrace substation.

And it's not simply one or two chaplains, or even five representing each aforementioned faith or religious discipline: RCSD fields approximately 34 chaplains countywide. And they're all unpaid volunteers.

“RCSD chaplains provide spiritual, emotional, and moral support,” says RCSD Chaplain Marty Wells, a retired U.S. Army command sergeant major. “There is no proselytizing. We simply serve people of all faiths.”

According to Wells: “Chaplains are trusted confidants. We are available for field (training) exercises, and we participate in ride-alongs with patrolling deputies.”

Wells adds: “We seek no personal recognition, and our varied backgrounds can be leveraged for myriad situations.”

Col. (Ret.) Bryan Walker, U.S. Army, a former commandant of the United States Army Chaplain Center and School at Fort Jackson, is today an RCSD chaplain. He agrees with Wells as regards “backgrounds,” leveraging, and parallels between law enforcement chaplains’ ministries and those of the military.

“I see parallels between law enforcement and military chaplain ministries in regard to ‘emotional layering,’” says Walker, RCSD's Chaplain of the Year for 2025. “Although it can occur for a variety of reasons, such as past trauma, I think it occurs with law enforcement and military members because of the emotional ‘thickening’ necessary to do their jobs.”

Richland County Sheriff Leon Lott is unabashedly direct in his praise of the Chaplaincy Program at RCSD. “What these men and women bring to the table in terms of real-world experience and

ministry could easily serve as a model for other law enforcement agencies, and I'm quite sure it does," says Lott. "We're all the beneficiaries of their service and outreach."

According to the chaplain applicant form, RCSD Chaplains are required to maintain a minimum of six contact hours each month with deputies and/or unsworn personnel within the department. Fact is: The amount of time RCSD chaplains spend with deputies and employees is much greater.

"For chaplains this a life-calling ministry," said Lott.

Not suprising: RCSD culture is one that has long embraced spiritual faith (like physical, mental, and emotional "wellness") as being vital to the overall well-being of its deputies. In August 2025 for instance, RCSD produced its official PRAYER OF THE RICHLAND COUNTY DEPUTY which was subsequently published at POLICE1, one of the nation's most widely-read law enforcement publications [see – <https://www.police1.com/police-heroes/from-texas-rangers-to-richland-county-a-prayer-for-todays-deputies>].

The RCSD Chaplaincy Program serves, and has long served, as the lifeblood of that very same culture.

– For more information about the Richland County Sheriff's Department, please visit <https://www.rcsd.net/>.

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