

The History of the New York State Association of Fire Chaplains, Inc.



(Updated July, 2024)

Table of Contents

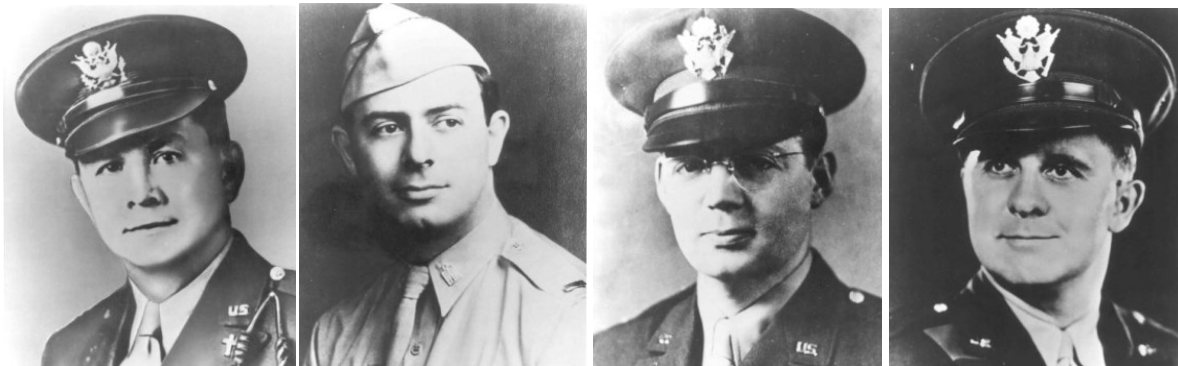
SS Dorchester	3
Chaplains' Seminar at FASNY - 1966	4
Incorporation	7
Support of Fire Chiefs and FASNY	8
Chaplain's Manual.....	8
1970's Conferences	9
Fire Academy Established	9
Women in Fire Service.....	10
1980's Conferences	10
Lay Chaplains	11
1994 - Lay Chief Chaplain	12
2000's Conferences	14
FASNY Chaplains' Committee	16
Marriage Renewal Service - 2006	18
First Woman Chief Chaplain.....	18
Blessing of the Fire Dogs.....	19
Chief Chaplain - LODD	20
Six LODDs as Chaplains	21
2010's Conferences	22
Logo Change.....	24
2020's Conferences	31
List of Founding Members	37
List of Charter Members	38
List of Chief Chaplains	39
Dates/Places - Annual Meetings/Conferences.....	43

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The scriptures tell us in Psalm 127 verse 1, “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it, unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain.”

As we searched the past for God’s divine anointing, we discovered that the Lord had used an event of the past to lead our founders together. Research compiled by Rev. Gregory Brennan (past Chief Chaplain), and by Rev. John J. Steger and Rev. Robert Winterkorn (two of the charter members and past Chief Chaplains) confirmed that an event which occurred on February 3, 1943 led directly to the founding of our organization.

SS Dorchester On that date in history a convoy of three ships was passing through “Torpedo Alley” 100 miles off the coast of Greenland. It was 1:00 A.M. when a torpedo struck a troopship, the SS Dorchester, in the midsection; she was sinking quickly into the freezing sea with 900 men on board. Four chaplains were on board: two Protestant pastors, a Catholic priest and a Rabbi, were among the first on deck and were calming the men. They were also handing out life jackets. When they ran out of life jackets, they took off their own and placed them on waiting soldiers without regard to faith or race. It was approximately 18 minutes from the time the torpedo struck until the ship went down. They were the last to be seen by witnesses, standing arm-in-arm on the hull of the Dorchester, each praying in their own way for God’s care for the 669 men who would die that evening. They included Methodist minister the Reverend George L. Fox, Reform Rabbi Alexander D. Goode (Ph.D.), Roman Catholic priest the Reverend John P. Washington, and Reformed Church in America minister the Reverend Clark V. Poling.



Rev. Fox

Rabbi Goode

Rev. Washington

Rev. Poling

All four have been honored for their selfless acts of courage, compassion and faith. According to the First Sergeant on board the *Dorchester*, “They were always together, they carried their faith together.” Throughout the voyage and in their last moments, they had demonstrated interfaith compassion in their relationship with the men and with each other.

This event in history was the seed that touched the heart of Rev. Robert Field, Chaplain of the Firemen’s Association of the State of New York (FASNY). Over the next few months the Lord began to give him a vision for chaplains in the Fire Service. Fire chaplains, well trained and representing the three faiths, chaplains known for compassion and faith, were working together for their God in their departments.

Chaplains’ Seminar at FASNY - 1966

Rev. Field invited Rev. Vincent A. Kennedy, a fire chaplain from Wantagh New York to be the keynote speaker at the upcoming Chaplains’ Seminar, which would take place at the Firemen’s Association of the State of New York’s Annual Meeting held on August 16, 1966 in Rochester, New York. There were 14 chaplains who attended this seminar. They may not have realized it that evening, but the hand of the Lord had brought them together with a divine purpose in mind.

Read the words of Father Kennedy as he addressed the group, and the thoughts of those who attended. As you read these minutes you can sense the presence of the Lord at the meeting.

Father Kennedy began his talk challenging all present, “We all, as fire chaplains, have a serious job to do. When the call goes out for the chaplain, it is important for firemen to know that their chaplain is there. Even when illness strikes, personnel of the department like to have the chaplain call, especially during serious illness. During my eighteen years of experience as a chaplain, I have come to realize the important role the chaplain plays in the lives of firemen and people caught in tragedy. This is an historical moment in the history of New York State as we of different faiths gather here as brother firefighters... We need to get to know each

other, see eye to eye, and clarify our standards. We are not chaplains for ourselves but for God... We are sometimes the only link between firemen and God.”

By the conclusion of this meeting, our organization was formed. Father Field suggested that officers be elected and moved that Father Vincent Kennedy be made President, Rev. John Brown, Vice President and Rev. Robert Bromfield, Secretary; he himself would act as an advisor. That evening of August 16, 1966, with the Spirit of the Lord moving in the hearts of those who attended, the New York State Association of Fire Chaplains was born.

There were fourteen Chaplains present at this first meeting, and they became the founders of our Association.

From the moment of its conception, the New York State Association of Fire Chaplains Inc. was to be an Association uniting chaplains from all faiths, whether lay or ordained, in the fire service. Through meetings, it provides fellowship, develops ideas and procedures for chaplains to follow in their ministry, and gives opportunities to develop skills in firematics through annual training.

The support provided by The Firemen’s Association of the State of New York (FASNY) allowed our new organization to begin. The support of FASNY continues today as we work together in the fire service. Several of our members have served as FASNY Chaplains.

The purpose of the founding seminar was nine-fold in its inquiry:

- General duties and responsibilities of chaplains of fire departments and companies and other organizations;

- Duties and responsibilities of the chaplain at a fire;

- Suggestions for a local annual Memorial Service;

- Conducting a service or wake in a funeral home;

- Blessing and dedication of a new fire house;

- Blessing of a new fire truck and/or other equipment;

Prayers to be used on special occasions;

Means of getting more clergy to participate in the work of the volunteers; and

General knowledge of and how to use, if necessary, a self-contained breathing apparatus and other equipment.

During that first successful meeting, it was decided that a committee should be formed to continue the work of formally organizing our Chaplain's Association. This committee met periodically in 1966 and 1967.

On March 10, 1967 a second formal meeting was called in Albany. The charter was officially presented along with a Constitution and set of By-Laws, which would give both a foundation as well as structure to build upon in the future. There were nineteen chaplains in attendance who became our nineteen Charter Members. Their names will be listed later in this history.

The stated purpose of the Association read "The mission of this Association is to unite all Chaplains of the State of New York in order to promote a deeper and wider knowledge of one another in the true ecumenical and interfaith spirit; and to establish statewide procedures of standardization in serving our fellow firemen, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), and God, our supreme Chief."

The first order of business was the needs of those firefighters living at The Firemen's Home in Hudson, which was overseen by FASNY. The members of the home were to be part of our ministry as chaplains, we were to pray for them; and visit them - often sharing Holy Communion with the shut-ins requesting the sacrament.

The new By-laws required the election of certain officers for this Association. They were as follows: Chief Chaplain, 1st Deputy Chief Chaplain, 2nd Deputy Chief Chaplain, Secretary-Treasurer and a Board of Directors. Filling these offices were Rev. Vincent A. Kennedy, of Wantagh, NY, Chief Chaplain; The Rev. John L. Brown, of Jordan, NY, 1st Deputy Chief Chaplain; the Rev. David W. Arnold, of New City, NY, 2nd Deputy Chief Chaplain; the Rev. Robert A. Bromfield, of Marcy NY, Secretary-

Treasurer. The Board of Directors included Rev Robert Field, Mr. Edward J. Sitzman, the Rev. Richard K. Much, Mr. James Reitz, Sr., the Rev. John J. Steger, and Mr. Harold D. Robbie.

Incorporation Our Association's Certificate of Incorporation dated June 1, 1967, was presented to the Board of Directors on June 10th at the spring meeting of our Association at the Concord Hotel in Fallsburg, NY.

The Association held two meetings each year, in January and May. The spring meeting included actual firematic training. Many of the ordained and lay chaplains, who were among our first members, were interior qualified firefighters as well as chaplains.

These Chaplains had a unique sense of dedication to their communities and their departments. Father Vincent Kennedy believed that it would be difficult to pray effectively for your firefighters if you didn't know what they were facing. Once you enter a working structure fire, you feel the intense heat, experience the darkness that limits your vision, and realize the sense of urgency, with every second counting, that will change the way a chaplain prays forever.

The spring meeting also offered the opportunity to build a relationship, a bond between the chaplains and their fire company. Those in need will approach you, because they know and trust you. This was the same relationship the four chaplains on the Dorchester had with their service personnel. Father Kennedy was so looked up to by his company that he was not only given non command Chief status in his Department, he was provided a Chief's car with red lights and siren with which to respond.

During the first twenty-four years as an Association, the chaplains received firematic training. At the spring meetings they used 2 ½" hose lines putting out oil fires, learned fire investigation and arson investigating procedures. They learned the use of Scott air packs and practiced with them. They learned the use of ground ladders as well as aerial ladders at a fire scene. Training for setting up a landing zone for life flight helicopter

rescue and training on crash trucks at area airports was also included. They trained on fire boats in Buffalo and shared in-water rescue demonstrations.

The winter meeting was given over to discussions, panels or papers concerning the work of the Fire Department Chaplain.

The late 1960's were troubled times in our country; the Civil Rights Movement brought the issue of race into the headlines on a daily basis. Our Association took a solid stand stating that the fire service was comprised of fire personnel from every race, creed and color, and that before God and within our fire companies, we were all brothers and sisters. The tragic loss of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. occurred shortly before our second spring meeting. A beautiful letter of condolence was written by Father Kennedy on behalf of our Association and was sent to Mrs. King. She was deeply moved by our words and our prayers.

Support of Fire Chiefs and FASNY

Our financial support at first came from gifts from fire departments within the State of New York. We were also assisted by gifts from the New York State Association of Fire Chiefs, as well as from FASNY. Their generosity will never be forgotten by our Association. These gifts were placed in a special fund with the hope that someday we could establish a central office.

Chaplain's Manual Over the next few years a Chaplain's Manual was developed containing the Constitution and Bylaws and an article on the Role of the Fire Chaplain. Also included were funeral and memorial services, as well as prayers for various occasions. These manuals were a great help, especially to our lay chaplains who had undertaken the responsibility of being God's representatives to their departments.

1970's Conferences Our training in the early 1970s focused on "Valuables in Church Fires." As chaplains we needed to have the knowledge of what articles of faith would be found in all Houses of Worship. We also focused our attention on the need for insurance coverage for firefighters. These efforts benefited every department in New York State. By 1976, as reports regarding our Association spread, we received requests from out of state chaplains for membership. These requests were gladly granted.

Our Tenth Anniversary celebration took place at Skaneateles, New York, on November 6th & 7th, 1976. For the first time the spouses were invited to attend. The Board of Directors realized that the support the spouses gave to the chaplain had a direct effect on how the chaplains were able to handle the stress related to the chaplain's duties. The highlight of the program was the presentation of a Proclamation from New York State Governor Hugh L. Carey recognizing the Tenth Anniversary of the Association, and proclaiming November 7, 1976 as "Fire Chaplains' Day in New York State". From its inception through the Tenth Anniversary, this Association was the only known "one of its kind" in the world.

In 1978, with our membership growing, it was decided that a separate educational program was to be implemented focusing on the training of new chaplains.

We had ordained members joining us who had never been associated with the fire service before, as well as lay chaplains who were firefighters, but who needed help with prayers and services. The Chaplain's Manual was a great help, and each year additional materials were added to it.

Fire Academy Established The fire services in New York State had a dream fulfilled in 1980 when a wonderful facility, formerly a monastery, was purchased by the State of New York. It became the Academy of Fire Science at Montour Falls, New York. It would provide classrooms for teaching, ample rooms for lodging, kitchen facilities to feed large groups, as well as large open acreage for outdoor training. Our Association was honored to be called upon to

dedicate this Academy, and to ask the Lord's blessings on all who would be trained there.

Women in Fire Service The membership of the fire departments within New York State was changing, and it was proud to welcome ladies into the fire service.

In May of 1981 our Association was delighted to welcome our first woman chaplain, Ruth Vaughan. A chaplain of the Hempstead Fire Department, Ruth became a valuable resource and a truly dedicated member. That same year it was decided that the Association would meet only once a year, in the spring time.

The hope of our organization has always been to see an active, fully trained chaplain in every fire company in New York State.

1980's Conferences In 1983 a slide show presentation was created which presented the duties of the chaplain in the fire service. It was very helpful for the new chaplains' training, and it attracted several new chaplains to our Association. By 1985 the Association had grown to over 400 member chaplains. From our inception we were members of FASNY, and in the spirit of our ecumenical outreach we joined the "The Fellowship of Fire Chaplains," an international organization also dedicated to representing our God in the fire service.

Once again we gathered at Skaneateles, New York for our 20th Anniversary meeting, held April 27, 1986. Spouses were invited and over 100 chaplains and spouses attended the conference's opening banquet. A new Association banner was presented and was displayed at all Association functions until retired in May 2014 and given to FASNY's Fire Museum in Hudson NY. A special Proclamation from Governor Mario Cuomo was presented and accepted by Chaplain Nelson Elliott. Father Vincent Kennedy gave a slide presentation taken over several years at various annual meetings that gave some idea of the places and various firematic exercises in which Association members were engaged.

For Association firematic training a simulated aircraft disaster was set up for all chaplains participating. This was to be a test of the system of Incident Command. Some chaplains were fighting the fire, some directing rescue operations, some covering radio communications, and some ministering to the needs of the “victims” and their families. The chaplain was also a natural choice to handle public information communications. The drill was tremendously successful.

In February of 1990 a six station telephone conference was arranged to link together the members of the Executive Board by Chief Chaplain Stephen Kish, Chaplain of the Skaneateles Fire Department. Chaplain Kish resigned his position during the conference call because of health reasons. He requested that First Deputy Chief Chaplain Rev. William Michatek assume the position as Chief Chaplain, which was so ordered by the committee during the conference call.

Lay Chaplains In February of 1990 the Executive Committee’s meeting brought about some major changes for our Association. The discussion was introduced concerning Lay Chaplains serving in the positions as Deputy Chief Chaplains and Chief Chaplain of our Association. The By-Laws did not mention this matter, but there had been an unwritten understanding among some, that the Chief Chaplain should be an ordained individual of their faith.

As the Nominating Committee convened, Chaplain Ruth Vaughan suggested that Tom Tobin’s name be placed in nomination for the office of Second Deputy Chief Chaplain. After much debate Chief Chaplain Bill Michatek called for a vote. Rev. Harold Langley nominated Tom and Rev. Alan Carvalho seconded the nomination. Tom Tobin served the Association well both as Training Officer and as the Chief Chaplain. Since that time several of our Lay Chaplains have served as Chief Chaplains, and they have added both depth and dimension to our organization.

The need for additional training in stress management and counseling, as well as firematics, was brought to the forefront once again when fire companies were alerted to and began searching for a small plane that had apparently crashed. Father Kennedy reported that they

discovered instead, a Boeing 707, Avianca Flight 52 which had crashed into a hilly, sparsely populated area of Cove Neck on Long Island. Of the 158 passengers and crew on board, 85 were injured and 73 were killed. Seven Chaplains from our Association helped at the tragic scene.

The Association's 25th Anniversary was held in Rochester on April 28, 1991. Chief Chaplain Michatek had a wonderful program in place. Once again the problem of stress and counseling was addressed as a result of the pressures of firematics becoming greater and greater. Seminars also included cult awareness and satanic worship which led to arson. The statistics involving juveniles and fires were also included. The last seminar focused on pre-emergency planning for hazardous materials in churches.

In 1992 our meeting was held in Lockport, and under the leadership of Chief Chaplain Robert Thomas, we continued both firematic training and studying the effects of stress on firefighters. Chief Chaplain Thomas had served as Chaplain to the New York State Police for many years. Because of his affiliation with the State Police, our Board meetings were held at the State Police Academy in Albany until 2010, when we began meeting earlier to be able to attend the NYS Fallen Firefighter Ceremony in Albany.

In 1993 our meeting was held at the Sherrill Fire Department where Rev. Bob Thomas was Chaplain. Once again, with our membership growing, we sought new ways to meet the needs of those in the Chaplain's ministry.

1994 - Lay Chief Chaplain In 1994 Tom Tobin became the first Lay Chaplain to hold the office of Chief Chaplain in our Association. The annual meeting was held at Port Washington. Tom focused our attention on recruiting and training new Chaplains. We were reminded once again that the dream of our founders was to have a Chaplain in every fire department in New York State. We were now going to train and equip them for service.

In 1995 our meeting was held in Alden. It was there that an additional dimension was added. Chief Chaplain Tom Tobin's wife Maurine, being a trained counselor, began to train our spouses to prepare serving with us, and to be a support system for the chaplains. That same year three VHS training tapes were produced: "An Introduction to Fire Chaplains" by Wayne Jagow, "Training the Chaplain" by Tom Tobin, and in the third tape, Maurine Tobin spoke to the spouses. All three tapes were very effective.

Our Thirtieth Anniversary was held in 1996 at Skaneateles, New York. Skaneateles had hosted our 10th and 20th Anniversaries and was eager to host our 30th in continuation of the tradition.

Father Greg Brennan took over the duties as Chief Chaplain. His focus was on our Chaplain's Manual, and he made sure that many additional services and prayers were added, giving all our chaplains more materials to work with. Father Brennan was a legend in the fire service; he was one of those few chaplains who had a red light, siren and fire radio in his personal vehicle. Father Greg responded to the needs of his community both as a firefighter and as chaplain no matter what time the call of duty was sounded. He served as our Association's first historian, and his preliminary notes are included in the first printed manual of our Association. This copy of our full history would not have been possible without his research and knowledge of our Association.

In 1997 we gathered in Allegheny for the first time. Chief Chaplain Brennan and the Allegheny Fire Department gave our Association a royal welcome. We continued our firematic training as well as sharpening our skills conducting firematic services. Our prayer meetings and Memorial Service were held in the unique Chapel at St. Bonaventure University where Chaplain Brennan served for many years.

In April 1998, Chief Chaplain Wayne Jagow brought our annual conference to The Firemen's Home in Hudson, New York. He shared with us both the needs and the possibilities of ministries helping our retired brother firemen. He shared with us that the Directors of FASNY were given a vision to expand The Firemen's Home in Hudson. They were not sure which direction to take, whether to renovate or to build. FASNY turned to our Association for help and prayers. In less than ten years the

New Home was formally dedicated by members of our Association. We all left with a love for the Home in our hearts, a great place to minister.

At the 1998 conference we also discussed our response to the ice storm that had paralyzed the northeastern part of New York State that winter. Many of the chaplains had opened their churches and fire halls to the community – a blessing to so many devastated by the ice storm.

At the Annual Conference of 1999 Chief Chaplain Jagow brought us to the western part of the state to the Niagara Air Reserve Station. The focus of our training during this conference was “Comprehensive Stress Management” and was led by our guest presenter, Dr. Grady Bray. The cost of this special course was paid for by a donation from the New York State Association of Fire Chiefs.

We promised our support to the New York State Association of Fire Chiefs whenever there may be a need. We also had the opportunity to pray with and give a spiritual farewell to the pilots and crews of the 107th Refueling Wing stationed at the base. They were being deployed to the Gulf War, while we were at the Base. The thought of 100 chaplains, keeping them in their prayers, brought tears to the eyes of many of our servicemen and women. We could see that our ministry could extend far beyond the fire service.

2000's Conferences

In 2000, we assembled in Tappan, New York, for our Annual conference. It was like turning back the pages of history as we gathered in a church where George Washington worshipped the Lord during a time in the Revolutionary War. It was also there that the trial of Major Andre, a British spy, was held. Chief Chaplain Jack Nunn was facing a battle with cancer. His body may have weakened, but his spirit was strong. This moment became a time of special worship, an experience bringing us closer together. Our Association was grateful to our Association's Director Franklin Knower for his efforts setting up and running this conference.

In 2001, still under the leadership of Chief Chaplain Nunn, we began using the Fire Training Academy at Montour Falls for our Annual Conference. We were welcomed as part of its firematic family. The

Academy accepted us as an essential part of the training program for all firefighters in the State. We were the Spiritual resource, and we were ready to respond at a moment's notice, whenever we were called upon. The chapel services led by Chief Chaplain Nunn were very personal at which we could feel the Spirit of the Lord moving, and preparing our hearts and minds for the tragedy that would touch us all in just a few months following. He reminded us that as Chaplains we could not be effective unless we were spiritually prepared.

September 11, 2001 We believe that one of our most horrific hours occurred on Tuesday morning - September 11th, 2001. For the second time in our country's history our nation was attacked (the first being the attack on the military installations on Oahu including the naval base at Pearl Harbor. Hawaii at the time was a US Territory and became a state on August 21st, 1959.) For the second time, America came together and worked without division, to help the victims at the Pentagon in Washington, DC, at the World Trade Center in New York City, and in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, where Flight 93 crashed.

One of the first to respond that morning was Father Mychal Judge. Father Judge was serving as one of five chaplains with FDNY. He was asked by NYC Mayor Giuliani to pray for the City of New York and the victims.

Father Judge administered Last Rites to some lying on the streets, then entered the lobby of the North Tower and reported to the command post where he continued to offer prayers for the rescuers, the injured and the dying. When the South Tower collapsed at 9:59 A.M. debris fell into the lobby of the North Tower, killing many inside, including Father Judge. Father Judge was a close friend of past Chief Chaplain Father Greg Brennen and both had attended seminary together. Mychal had turned to Greg and our Association for spiritual and emotional support in July of 1996 following the crash of TWA Flight 800 off Long Island. These two great friends were reunited in the courts of heaven in August of 2007 when Father Greg died in a boating accident while en route to a church youth camp. Both their ministries are still continuing as an inspiration to all of us to be more dedicated chaplains.

All of our training and preparation from the inception of our Association was to prepare and equip us to deal with tragedies wherever they might occur. On September 11th 2001 we were needed just miles from our homes. On that fateful day and in the days which followed, at least fourteen chaplains who belong to our Association, ministered to those in need at Ground Zero. Some chaplains helped with counseling, others prayed with the rescue workers, some took on the responsibilities at the morgue, some ministered to the families of the victims, while others assisted with search and rescue operations. God used us to meet the deepest needs of our friends, neighbors, and rescue personnel because we were prepared! We shall never forget 9-11-01.

On February 7, 2011 Fr. Mychal Judge was made a member of the New York State Association of Fire Chaplains, Inc. posthumously - retroactive to 1996. It was assumed that he had been a member of the Association. His conversations with Chief Chaplain Brennan indicated that even Fr. Judge thought he was a member, but records could not be found indicating his membership.

FASNY Chaplains' Committee

Following the events of September 2001 the fire service was forever changed in the hearts of all Americans. The 343 Firefighters who gave their lives without a moment of hesitation brought a deeper sense of spiritual awareness to everyone in the fire service. It was at that time that the officers of the Firemen's Association of the State of New York (FASNY) requested that Rev. Wayne Jagow form a FASNY Chaplains' Committee. Our responsibilities would be the spiritual lives of the membership, and we would lead worship services at the fall and spring meetings concluding both of them with a Communion Service.

We would also be in charge of the Annual FASNY Memorial Services. Whenever possible we would attend the firematic funeral services of FASNY members who were called home to be with the Lord. We were privileged to write monthly articles in the Chaplain's Corner of FASNY's monthly magazine, *The Volunteer Firefighter*.

All members of this committee were members of our Association. Father Field would have been very proud of that fact. The following is a list of the members of the FASNY Chaplains' Committee: Rev. Wayne Jagow Chairman, Rev. Jim Van Houten Co Chairman, Chaplain Franklin

Knower, Fr. Hugh Connaghan, Rev. Wilbert Bradley, Rev. Leon Bovell, Fr. Bernard Granger, Fr. Daniel Bitsko, Fr. Bill Michatek, and Rev. Robert Winkerton.

In 2002 we gathered at Smithtown, Long Island where Chief Chaplain Dan Bitsko had arranged for us to return to Ground Zero for a service of prayer and remembrance. It was very moving to gather with 100 Chaplains from our Association, placing a wreath and sharing prayers for both the living and the dead. We had the opportunity to meet some of the widows and family members of FDNY fighters lost on 9-11; they will forever be in our hearts.

In 2003 we assembled at the Academy of Fire Science at Montour Falls for our meeting. The subject was "Line of Duty Deaths." We all realized what an important topic this was, and we needed to be ready to assist whenever or wherever we were needed. Daniel J. McGuire (President of CISM Perspectives, Inc.) was our guest speaker, and the information we received prepared us to minister in a very personal way if a member of our company is called home in the Line of Duty.

In 2004 we assembled at Huntington, Long Island. Chief Chaplain Ed Billia prepared a wonderful program which outlined the role of the chaplain and gave everyone a great deal of material to assist us in our ministries. He challenged us in a presentation entitled, "Spirituality and the Chaplain." Chief Chaplain Billia also introduced the idea of recognizing members with 25 years of service.

We returned to the Academy of Fire Science in April of 2005. The key topic of the conference was "Death Notification Within Our Departments." We studied what we would say to children and to adults. They would only hear this news once, and how we reported it would never be forgotten.

The Lord had another plan for this conference, too. We were to become a living prayer chain, strong and unbroken, as we prayed for Chief Chaplain Ed Billia who was stricken by a life threatening heart problem while attending the conference. The Lord provided chaplains in Ed's room at the Academy, at the Schuyler Hospital in Montour Falls, on the Life Flight to Long Island and in his hospital room when he reached

the Island. We became spiritual partners united together in the chaplain's ministry. The Lord answered our prayers and Ed made a full recovery.

We celebrated our 40th Anniversary on April 23, 2006 returning to the Niagara Air Reserve Station where Chief Chaplain Bill Miles had prepared an incredible program of activities. As with the 10th and 20th Anniversaries, all of the spouses were invited, and special activities were in place to make them feel quite at home. We started with inspiring devotions each morning and the singing aroused our spirits. Our firematic training included NIMS training, which we as chaplains were all mandated to complete. The members of Bill's fire company, Sweeney Hose Company #7, prepared and served an Anniversary Banquet which was fit for royalty. We had a chance to share in some of our past history and it was wonderful to see where the Lord had led us over these past 40 years. Our Memorial Service was held at the Tonawanda Free Methodist Church. The church prepared a reception for us following the service.

Marriage Renewal Service - 2006

The highlight of the conference took place on Wednesday, April 26th. With the formalities and duties completed, the chaplains and their spouses went to Niagara Falls for a Marriage Renewal and Commitment Ceremony. We all realized that our Charter Members had a vision that Roman Catholic, Jewish and Protestant chaplains could be partners together in a ministry within the fire service. Bill reminded us that without our life's partners working with us, our outreach will be greatly limited.

First Woman Chief Chaplain

There was another change on this, our 40th Anniversary, and one worth noting. Since our conception, the Chief and Deputy Chaplains were all men. At first they were all ordained, then after many years a Lay Chaplain was elected to become 2nd Deputy Chief Chaplain, and of course Tom Tobin became a wonderful Chief Chaplain, as did those Lay Chaplains who followed him.

It was a joy to see Barrie-Lyn Foster elected as our first woman 2nd Deputy Chief Chaplain. She was a soft spoken, inspiring and gifted Chief

Chaplain, and she prepared the way for many other women to follow in her footsteps.

For our 41st Chaplains conference, April 29th to May 2nd, we returned to the State's Academy of Fire Science at Montour Falls. We were again treated as special guests by the staff of the Academy. They outdid themselves to meet our every need. Monday evening, they prepared a wonderful dinner for us in the dining hall after which we shared in a special Memorial Service remembering those from our Association called home during the past year. Chief Chaplain Bill Miles led us in devotions each morning. The time together in prayer and fellowship became the highlight of the day. We spent two days of intensive training presented by Rev. Leon VanWie, Rev. Thomas Margrave and individuals from the Fire Service Survivors Network on preparing memorial and funeral services, secondly, on Death Notification and third, preparing our departments for Line of Duty Deaths and funerals. Because of their personal knowledge and first-hand experiences, we certainly learned a significant amount of information to help us in our responsibilities and duties. The conference was outstanding.

Blessing of the Fire Dogs

Three firemen training with their dogs asked if we might bless the dogs, and pray that they would all pass the rigid tests which were to be given that day. Fr. Hugh Connaghan stepped forward and led us in a special service blessing both the dogs and their trainers. We celebrated that afternoon with the news that all of the dogs passed with flying colors. It was an inspiring conference, one long to be remembered.

Our 42nd Chaplains Conference brought us back to Huntington Station, Long Island where we were welcomed by Chief Chaplain Richard Holst and the Huntington Manor Fire Department. The author of Hebrews 12:1 says "Run with patience the race set before us," which certainly describes Chief Chaplain Richie Holst. Richie was nominated to be 2nd Deputy Chief Chaplain in 2000, but his name was removed by the Nominating Committee because of a bylaw conflict. He was again nominated by the committee to be 2nd Deputy Chief Chaplain in 2002, as was William Miles. William Miles won that election. Richie was again nominated by the Nominating Committee in 2004, and the third time he was elected. But through all these disappointments Richie never lost

heart. In patience he rose above the lost opportunities and demonstrated to everyone that he had both the heart of a firefighter, a friend, as well as the heart of a chaplain. No greater compliment can be paid to anyone in the fire service.

We began our training in a one-day seminar titled “Comprehensive Acute Traumatic Stress Management” taught by Dr. Raymond Shelton. The major changes in debriefing would help to ease the pain of traumatic stress for all of the members of our departments.

The Memorial Service was held at St. Peter’s Lutheran Church where 2nd Deputy Chief Chaplain Barrie-Lyn Foster was our speaker. We honored fifteen chaplains including Past Chief Chaplain Rev. Nelson R. Elliott and Past Chief Chaplain Father J. Greg Brennan.

On the second day of our conference Chief Chaplain Holst arranged a special tour of the four chapels located at John F. Kennedy Airport followed by a great lunch. In the afternoon we proceeded to the Port Authority Police Academy Rescue Training Center for a demonstration of airplane rescue equipment. It was an amazing experience riding in the crash trucks as they attacked the flames in a training exercise. Chaplain Holst was very focused on the devotional time each morning of the conference. Each day he made sure that we were spiritually challenged. It was a great conference.

Our 43rd Conference was again held at the Fire Academy in Montour Falls, beginning on Sunday April 26th to the 29th 2009. Chief Chaplain Richie Holst encouraged everyone to join together for the morning devotions; he felt that the devotions really bonded us together.

Our training focused on the “Seven Habits of Highly Effective Firefighters” and was facilitated by Chaplain Tom Margrave and Chaplain Leon VanWie. The “Seven Habits of Highly Effective Firefighters” facilitator training had been offered by the New York State Association of Fire Chiefs. We all learned how to schedule our time and use it more wisely. Once again, joining together for the Memorial Service, we honored those from our Association who had passed away during that year. It was a special time of fellowship. It made us all mindful of God’s wonderful love for us all, and reminded us that there was a place in heaven awaiting us in the future. The friendships built at these conferences as well as the training we receive, bond our hearts together.

Chief Chaplain - LODD

On the morning of September 9th at 3:02 A.M. Chief Chaplain Richie Holst was walking home from his fire house following his department's earlier emergency call. He smelled smoke, investigated and discovered a working structure fire at the Uber Café in Huntington Station. He called in the alarm of fire, checked to be sure no one was inside, and then began his duties as a Fire Police Officer at the scene.

It was at that time that Chief Chaplain Holst collapsed and was transported to Huntington Hospital, where he was later pronounced dead. Richie became the first Chief Chaplain of our Association to die in the Line of Duty. Richie was a 31-year member of the Huntington Manor Fire Department, where he served for many years as their chaplain. The Chief of his department, Robert Herley, called Richie, "A Firefighter among Firefighters and a Man among Men". Firematic Services were held to honor Richie and were attended by several thousand Firefighters. Richie was posthumously honored by his Department promoting him to the rank of Honorary Chief. Richie was interred in the National Cemetery, an honor given to him as a Navy Veteran who served in Viet Nam on the U.S.S. Saratoga. Richie was a very special friend who will be deeply missed - but never forgotten. Our thoughts and prayers will continue to be with Richie's wife, Noreen.

Six LODDs as Chaplains

Five chaplains have died in the Line of Duty in New York State:

John Carson	Jericho FD	July 10, 1984
Rev. Mychal Judge	FDNY (Posthumous Membership)	September 11, 2001
Richard W. Holst	Huntington Manor FD (Chief Chaplain)	September 9, 2009
LeRoy A. Kemp	Tioga Center FD	January 13, 2010
Ray Thielke	(Greater Lennox Ambulance Service and Madison County Sheriff's Office) (9/11/01 Related Injury)	September 1, 2018
Rev. Daniel J. Bitsko	Smithtown FD	September 4, 2019

Our fall 2009 meeting of the Board of Directors was called at Montour Falls on September 27th and 28th. A swearing in ceremony was held at which time 1st Deputy Chief Chaplain Barrie-Lyn Foster was sworn in as Chief Chaplain of our Association and 2nd Deputy Chief Chaplain Ken Palmer was sworn in as 1st Deputy Chief Chaplain. This left the office of 2nd Deputy Chief Chaplain open.

Our Bylaws gave two options for filling a vacant office. One was to leave the office open until the general election in April of 2010 and the second option was to fill the office temporarily until the general election was held at our conference. It was decided that a temporary election had to be held and the Nominating Committee presented the name of James Hanly for the position of 2nd Deputy Chief Chaplain. He was elected temporarily to that position. At the general election in April a candidate was to be elected to permanently fill the position of 2nd Deputy Chief Chaplain.

2010's Conferences

A memorial Service was held to honor and pay tribute to Chief Chaplain Richard W. Holst who had died in the Line of Duty on September 9th.

Our 44th Annual Training Conference in 2010 was held in and around Auburn, New York at the Aurelius Volunteer Fire Department. Chief Chaplain Barrie-Lyn Foster had planned an agenda filled with both chaplain and firematic training. We began with our election of officers. Rev. Kenneth Hessel was elected to the office of 2nd Deputy Chief Chaplain. Following devotions, we were welcomed by the City of Auburn Fire Department for a full tour of their station house - their hospitality will long be remembered. Our training the first day focused on "Courage to be Safe." We concluded the day with our annual Memorial Service held at the Sacred Heart Church in Owasco. Following the service, we were treated to a prime rib dinner and were then challenged by a moving devotional message. The second day of the conference, following devotions, we focused on "Religious Sensitive Care," and "Working with Alzheimer's Patients and Their Families." In the afternoon our focus was on "Developing an Effective Team between the Chief and the Chaplain." The day was concluded at the Auburn Volunteer Fire Department where we watched an MVA extrication demonstration, shared in a wonderful

dinner, and then shared in an overview of NY's first chemical suicide. On Wednesday we began with devotions, focused on regional and county networking, and then shared in panel discussion with a question and answer time with both fire chaplains and fire chiefs.

It was an action packed conference which covered many areas of a chaplain's ministry. After another great lunch, we all returned to our homes.

Our 45th Annual Training Conference was held at the Academy of Fire Science in Montour Falls, New York. The theme of this conference was "Cooperation without Compromise," and all who attended were challenged to work together more closely while not comprising our office of chaplain. Father Joe Bayne reminded us that just having a chaplain on the scene is a "Ministry of the Presence of God."

We were challenged by David Jacobowitz, President of FASNY and Mr. Tony Cruz, State Director of the Firefighter Cancer Support Network. Directors Bill Mayo and Rev. Jim Van Houten presented a challenging "Refresher Course for Chaplains" based on their response as chaplains on September 11, 2001 to Ground Zero at the World Trade Center where the Twin Towers once stood.

They reminded everyone of the importance of our training, that we must remain both physically and spiritually fit so that we may respond at a moment's notice.

Director Dr. Cynthia Huling Hummel presented her newest book "The Lord is like a Firefighter." The book shows the similarities between the Lord's watchful care over us, and the firefighter's watchful care over his/her community. We concluded the conference with training and certification in CPR and the proper use of an AED in a seminar led by Mr. David Newert. Following lunch at the Academy we headed back to our hometowns.

Our 46th Annual Training Conference was held in Little Falls, New York at the Knights Inn beginning on Sunday, April 29, 2012. Chief Chaplain Kenneth Palmer, a 53-year member of the Mohawk Fire Department, planned a conference which encouraged both our firematic and our spiritual skills. We were all deeply impressed by the hospitality shown to us by the staff of the Knights Inn; they gladly and graciously met

our every need. Our firematic training focused on “Weapons of Mass Destruction,” and we were all reminded that in the world in which we live today, we could all face such a disaster at any time. Over the next three days our instructor, Joseph Crisino, shared with us the many possible disasters which might occur and that we as chaplains would be needed to minister not only to our departments, but to the general public as well. We also shared an informative seminar with instructor Steve McMurray on “Chaplains and the Media” - it was very informative.

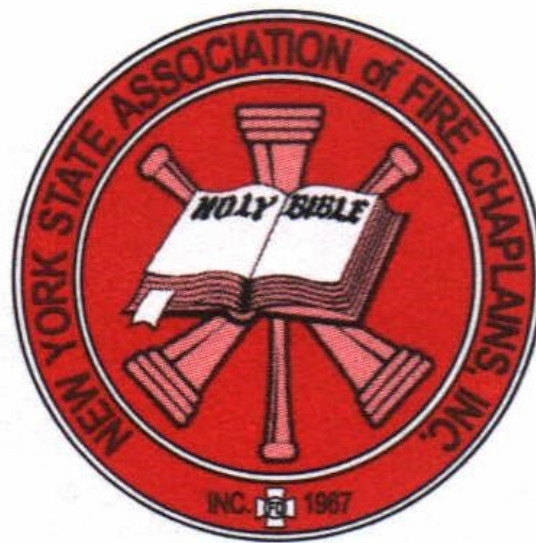
Our annual Memorial Service was held at the Mohawk Reformed Church where Ken serves as a Deacon. Ken and his wife, Sharon, have led our devotionals each morning at our annual conferences for years, but we all felt doubly blessed since Ken was now our Chief Chaplain. After a wonderful lunch the conference was concluded.

Logo Change

The 2012 Annual Meeting was not without controversy. For nearly a year proposed changes to the Association’s logo had been suggested. Two ideas surfaced, one to suggest visually the non-secular diversity of the Association, and the other to distinctively denote the Association’s service to both fire and EMS. As a preliminary step, much of the supply stock with the current logo was made available for sale at the 2011 Annual Conference

At the Fall Meeting of the Board of Directors in Albany in 2011 Chief Chaplain Barrie-Lyn proposed that the Association look at updating our Logo. There were several reasons. First in keeping with the interfaith spirit of Four Chaplains, Barrie-Lyn felt that the Association embraced fire chaplains of many faiths. The FDNY has just appointed its first Moslem chaplain and we have had chaplains of the Jewish faith for many years. Second, the membership in our association had diversified and included chaplains who ministered with Emergency Medical organizations. New Central Director Tom Margrave who was also the new chair of the Supply Committee was asked to lead the efforts. Interested members of the Board met with Chaplain Margrave and came up with a number of ideas of new designs. Some included the map of New York State. Although all the major religions have sacred writings, not all are in the form of a book. The Holy Bible is the Christian sacred scripture but including the term on the book was not seen as being interfaith. However, the consensus was to retain the shape of the book as a reminder of our original logo.

With the help of graphic designers at Impressive Imprints which produce many of our uniform items, three designs were done which showed that EMS chaplaincy had joined fire chaplaincy as the key ministries of the majority of our members. The three designs were mailed to the membership for their preference. Preferences were shown on postcards which were returned to Chaplain Margrave who tallied the numbers. The vast majority of returns picked the design with the Star of Life symbolizing EMS and the St. Florian's Cross with fire helmet superimposed on a gold background. The results were provided to the Board and brought to the Annual Conference where the chosen design was shown to the membership. Not everyone was happy with this development and there was a lively discussion which explained the process, the reasons for the change, and the fact that the original logo was still on file with the State incorporation papers. After much discussion the majority of the membership supported the change which is graphically depicted on the cover of this history. The logo that had served us well since our inception was officially retired:



Our 47th Annual Training Conference was held April 23, 2013 at the State's Academy of Fire Science in Montour Falls, New York. The theme which Chief Chaplain Ken Palmer chose for this conference was entitled; "From Fires to Funerals," a reminder of the diverse duties that a chaplain is called upon to perform. In order to cover the many topics involved, separate seminars were scheduled. The topics included: chaplaincy methods, fire investigation, "Everyone Goes Home," the difference between a firefighter's memorial service and a funeral, mutual aid for chaplains, and emotional first aid.

On Tuesday Father Bill Michatek shared an account of his experience at the tragedy at West Webster, NY where two firefighters were shot to death at a fire scene. A Greece, New York, police officer and two other firefighters were also shot, but survived. We continued with additional seminars on stress management, harassment awareness, fire chief's perspectives, God's girls, and a refresher course in CPR. The conference was both a challenge and a blessing to all who attended. We left for home with much to think about.

Our 48th Annual Training Conference was held in Westbury, New York beginning on April 27, 2014. Chief Chaplain Ken Hessel had worked tirelessly to assure all that this conference would be a blessing to all who attended. After Monday's devotions we opened the conference with a warm welcome and then proceeded to the 9-11 memorial at Ground Zero. The sixteen-acre debris field had long been cleared, and the Freedom Tower has risen to replace the Twin Towers. However, for those of us who had worked rescue and recovery it brought back vivid memories which included sight, smell and taste. Yet, it was good to face those memories, to reprocess them and once and for all, resolve them in our minds. Many of the chaplains found it comforting to be able to touch and see the names of the lost and perhaps make peace with the past. Many expressed the feeling of the weight being lifted off of their hearts

After leaving the memorial we went up town past Grant's Tomb and shared a wonderful lunch and an insightful session about ministries following 9-11 at the main offices of many local denominational headquarters and church agencies on Riverside Drive. The building is commonly referred to as "The God Box". The staff of the Lutheran Social Services, one of the tenants, briefed us on their ongoing casework after Hurricane Sandy. Our

dinner and annual meeting followed that evening.

On Tuesday we shared sessions on Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM”, natural tragedy to heal, and local tragedy to heal. That evening our Memorial Service was held at the Life Lutheran Church in Old Westbury at which Chief Chaplain Ken Hessel was our speaker. Following our service, we boarded buses for a dinner cruise to and around Manhattan to the Statue of Liberty. Ken provided us with a DJ playing music on the upper deck. The healing process continued as we danced the night away to some good old rock and roll.

Such a great time was had by all. Wednesday we concluded the conference with another session on CISM and a fine lunch. After lunch we all returned to our homes.

The 49th conference was held April 19th - 22nd, 2015 at the Fire Academy of Science at Montour Falls. Chief Chaplain Ken Hessel had chosen the topic “Back to the Basics.” This training was to serve as a great introduction for new chaplains, as well as a time for seasoned chaplains to refresh their skills. Rev. Barrie-Lyn Foster and Rev. Shelly Vamosy were our trainers. The program they developed hopefully will be taught at the Fire Academy as a credited course in the future. Since the incident command system (ICS) and the national incident management system (NIMS) are so important to chaplains working at major incidents, we offered this training to those who had not taken it before. We were all challenged by the program.

2016 Conference Agenda

On Monday traveled to the West Point Military Academy where we received training from their chaplains, followed by a visit to the The National Purple Heart Hall of Honor to honor those wounded in the service of our country. Dinner that evening was hosted by Rev. Brian Randazzo at the Coldenham fire house. Following dinner we held our Annual Meeting.

Tuesday morning there were seminars pertaining to suicide prevention among firefighters, and the role of the chaplain. In the afternoon a seminar on how to deal with the families of persons missing both in local instances as well as mass casualties was taught by Lt. Mark Giffen NYPD (Ret.). Our Memorial Service and annual banquet followed at the Walden Fire Department’s social hall.

Our conference concluded with a Wednesday morning seminar dealing with CISM in the fire service taught by Dr. Ray Shelton. Following Dr. Shelton's presentation, we had lunch and safely returned to our homes.

Each morning of the conference devotions, open to all faiths, was held following breakfast in our lodging at the Ramada Inn, Newburgh.

2017 Conference

The 51st Annual Training Conference and Annual membership meeting of the NYSAFC, Inc., was held at the Niagara Air Reserve Station in Niagara Falls, New York from Sunday April 30th to Wednesday May 3rd 2017.

The theme of the conference was, "Gaining Knowledge From Each Other." Approximately eighty (80) members and some of their spouses attended the conference with guests from FASNY also attending.

The conference committee was headed by Past Chief Chaplain (2006-2008) and current Executive Secretary, William Miles who served as chairman and included Father Joe Bayne, Chaplain Howard Morgan, Past Treasurer Gary Hunt, West Director Tim Newman, West Central Director Spence Kennedy, members of the Tonawanda FD Chaplains' Corps., and Chief Chaplain Rev. Jim Van Houten. Our accommodations at the Air Base were first class and the Base and their staff made us all feel very welcome.

Following registration and check in on Sunday afternoon, we shared a Buffalo style dinner of chicken wings, pizza, and beef on wick sandwiches, which was followed by a social gathering including karaoke night together. We quickly discovered that none of us were singers. Surprisingly, nobody chose religious music to sing.

Each morning began with breakfast provided by the air base to feed the body and this was followed by Devotions, which fed our souls. The committee felt that we all had a love for our communities, so we became firefighters, fire police, or EMS responders. Because we all had a love for the Lord, we all became fire/ems chaplains. Gathering together, singing praises to our God, sharing prayer requests for others and then spending time in prayer makes the conference an informative blessing. Starting the

day with God allows us to listen during our seminars with our ears as well as our hearts.

Following devotions, we held our Annual membership meeting which helps to keep our members informed about the workings of our Association. And it also allows them to give us input as to the direction they would like to see us travel in the future. Our Treasurer gave us a report on our finances and our Directors shared what they have been doing in their regions in the past year. We listen closely to our members during new business as they tell us what they would like to see presented in future conferences. A very proud moment happened when Executive Secretary Miles suggested that Barbara Duesler, wife of departed member Ted Duesler be made an Honorary Member of the Association for all her years of support to Ted and for making sure he was able to get to the Annual Conferences even during his final years. It was a great moment for the Association to accept Barbara as an Honorary Member.

Following our meeting, Training Committee Chairman William Miles, who is also our Executive Secretary, taught a special seminar for our members on "Training for Our Spouses and Significant Others". The class was designed to help the spouses and significant others learn the aspects of the fire service and what they can expect. It also answered questions raised by spouses and significant others. Notes were handed out and the spouses in attendance became the class. Everyone found the class to be very informative and useful in their own areas.

After lunch we had a tour of the Niagara Air Reserve Base and their fire station. The firefighting equipment at the Air Base is huge compared to the apparatus in our stations. Many of our chaplains were observed climbing around inside the crash trucks like little kids. We concluded the day with a "Chaplain's Swap", a time for sharing ideas and helpful materials with each other.

Tuesday morning following breakfast and devotions, Brian McQueen, a cancer survivor, was our instructor in a seminar entitled, "Cancer in the Fire Service." This is the number one concern among firefighters today. We learned that our risk of cancer is many times higher than that of the average person. The carcinogens in the smoke in the fires we are fighting is deadly and the residue that it leaves on our hoods and turn out gear are harmful to us and to our families, if we bring them into our homes. It was an amazing seminar filled with lifesaving information.

After lunch NYSAFC members: Father Joe Bayne, Chaplain of the Buffalo Fire Dept. and Erie County Emergency Services, assisted by Howard Morgan, Chaplain and chairman of the Niagara County Volunteer Fireman's Association's LODD Committee presented a seminar on the "Chaplain's Role in a Line of Duty Death." Their seminar covered a video on reflections on past LODD deaths followed by both sharing personal stories about cases which they had dealt with as chaplains. We focused our attention on planning a firematic funeral and protocols which should be followed at the funeral home.

After a break we practiced what we had learned by conducting a mock funeral, (casket was provided courtesy of Gary Hunt. Don't know how he got that on and off the base, but he did?). This provided many of our chaplains with first-hand experience. We also dealt with the notification of the next of kin in the case of a LODD death. No one ever feels comfortable delivering the news of the death of a loved one, but it is the chaplain who is usually called upon by his or her department. We concluded with the personal testimony by a father whose son was killed in the line of duty working as a State Trooper. He spoke of how comforting it was to have a chaplain pray with his family following the notification. Just an FYI: A police dog is named after a fallen trooper in a Line of Duty death. Their seminar was a powerful presentation.

We boarded buses dressed in our class A uniforms and were transported to the Bethesda Full Gospel Church in Tonawanda for our Annual Memorial Service. We were met by an honor guard including a flag flying from ladder trucks provided by the City of Tonawanda Fire Department. Tonawanda Fire Department Chaplain, Pastor Sam Ciffa (a member of the NYSAFC) led the memorial service. We honored several of our members who were called home to be with the Lord in the past year.

The evening concluded with a celebration banquet provided by Chief Chuck Stuart at the Tonawanda Fire Department Headquarters. First Deputy Chief Leon VanWie arranged for a photographer to take photos of all of our chaplains and their spouses, so those moments were preserved for years to come.

On Wednesday, following breakfast and devotions, SS Brenda Whelan, a member of the Tonawanda FD Chaplains Corps., Chaplain of Disaster Services and a member of the NYSAFC, Inc., presented a seminar on, "Caring for the Care Giver." She shared with us the power of

reflection and meditation as we minister to our own souls following traumatic circumstances in the fire service. It was like a Spiritual Debriefing which took the pain we were feeling and placed it back on God's shoulders, It was a blessing to all of us.

The conference closed with lunch and following a Benediction prayer, we all headed home both challenged and refreshed. This conference lived up to its theme of "Gaining Knowledge from Each Other."

~ Chief Chaplain, Rev. Jim Van Houten

2018 Conference

To be updated by Chief Chaplain Bill Mayo

2019 Conference

To be updated by Chief Chaplain Bill Mayo

2020 Conference

April 26-29, 2020 were the dates set for the annual training conference to be held in Watertown, New York. The Corona Virus and COVID-19 changed all of that. Wanting to keep our chaplains safe, the Board of Directors, reluctantly, decided to cancel the conference. We are planning for the 2021 conference to be held in Watertown.

~ Chief Chaplain, Rev. Leon VanWie

2021 Conference

After one cancellation and a postponement, we were able to meet in Watertown August 15-18, 2021. Sunday evening began with a long overdue welcome from Chief Chaplain VanWie. We then enjoyed some ice cream treats and listened to the "Friends of God" band.

On Monday we began with devotions in the Jewish tradition provided by Rabbi Teresa M. J. W. Snyder. Dr. Ryan N. Fraser, Ph.D.,

LCPT then offered our training, which dealt with Crisis Intervention and Psychological First Aid. In all we had 10 hours of training which culminated in a two-hour "drill" where we put what we learned into practice. Ryan's flexibility was key in the success of our training as he adapted the material to the ability of the chaplains attending. Many positive comments were received.

On Monday, while the chaplains were starting their training, the spouses met with Chief Chaplain VanWie's wife, Margie, for some get-acquainted time and the lifting of prayers.

Monday afternoon we enjoyed a luncheon boat cruise on the St. Lawrence River with Uncle Sam's Boat Lines. Following the relaxing afternoon on the water, we attended the annual memorial service at Watertown: Asbury United Methodist Church where we honored and remembered 22 chaplains who have answered their last alarm: Robert J. McCartney (Highland Hose Company), Joseph M. O'Donnell (Burnsville), Harold C. Staffehl (Hamburg), Daniel J. Bitsko (Smithtown), Alan E. Brokaw (Warrensburg), Terry O'Shaughnessy, Sr. (West Carthage), Harry R. Little (Carthage), Robert E. Vaughan (Middletown), Donald P. McGlooin (Charles Folger Hook/Ladder, Geneva), Charles F. Huber, Jr. (North Babylon), Domingo "Dominick" Reyes Jr. (Middletown), Carl H. Meyers (Pekin), John J. "Jack" Matott (Lyncourt), Bertrand W. "Bud" Morgan (North Greece), Franklin H. Knowler Jr. (Tappan), Barbara Jean (Baker) Duesler (Cherry Valley), Vanessa E. "Nessy" Jones (Livingston County VFPA), Anthony Jerome "Jerry" Ferro (Corinth), Isaac "Yits" Kantrowitz (Woodridge), Thomas F. Wickett (Ionia), Paul W. Roemer Sr. (Hudson - JW Edmonds/HW Rogers), and Theodore Thomas Kolakowski (Bayville FD).

Our banquet was then held at our host hotel, the Ramada Inn. Our officers and Board of Directors were publicly sworn in and a great meal was enjoyed. During the dinner, chaplains slipped away to have their photographs taken to be included in a composite portrait of all those attending the 2021 conference, which is being provided by Fraternal Composites of Utica.

We began Tuesday morning with devotions, led in Contemporary Christian style by 2nd Deputy Chief Chaplain Richard Bolster.

Dr. Fraser picked up where he left off with training and the spouses enjoyed some fellowship time and shopping.

On Tuesday afternoon the spouses enjoyed time "Painting with Lynette Lundy Beck", while the chaplains focused on the RAPID technique for crisis intervention.

Late Tuesday afternoon the Past Chief Chaplains attending shared

with the group the highlights of their annual conferences over the years, going back to Chief Chaplain Alan D. Carvalho telling of his coming into the association and the annual conferences in 1981-1983. In addition to Alan, we heard from Past Chief Chaplains William A. Miles, Barrie-Lyn Foster, Kenneth W. Palmer and William Mayo. It proved to be as entertaining as it was enlightening. 1st Deputy Chief Chaplain Thomas W. With shared the dates of next year's annual conference (April 24-27, 2022) along with the training highlights. 2nd Deputy Chief Chaplain Richard G. Bolster then mentioned his conference that will be coming up in the North Country in 2024.

After dinner, as noted earlier, we utilized the RAPID technique to deal with two scenarios. In the first, Dr. Ryan Fraser attempted to do everything "wrong". It was a humorous way to learn what we should NOT do. The second scenario hit close to home as we dealt with a possible terrorist bombing. It was a very fitting way to wrap up our two days of training with Ryan.

Wednesday began with devotions, led in the Orthodox Christian tradition by 1st Deputy Chief Chaplain Thomas With. Devotions were followed by a presentation by Director Emeritus Canon Samuel P. Lundy on Historic Military Chaplains, specifically, the chaplains who served during the American Civil War.

Following lunch the chaplains headed home.
(Submitted by Chaplain Leon VanWie)

2022 Conference

The NYSAFC held their Annual Training Conference July 17-20, 2022, at the Comfort Inn & Suites, East Greenbush, NY. It was an informative Conference with Training from the Four Chaplains Foundation, NYS Office of Mental Health, and Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Services Office of Fire Prevention and Control. The theme of the 2022 Conference was the "Four Chaplains".

We had Chaplain Refresher Training by Rev. Gary Holden, Senior Chaplain of the Four Chaplains Foundation. Chaplain Holder did a day long presentation on "Introduction to being a Fire Chaplain". We had Steven Moskowitz, MSW, NYS Office of Mental Health, with subjects on "Psychological First Aid – Responding to extreme stress", a review of "NYS Project Hope", and, "NYS Disasters & Mental Health Response". Steven is the Director, Bureau of Emergency Preparedness and Response.

On Tuesday evening, we held our Annual Memorial Service at the Fuller Road Fire Dept. Firehouse in Colonie, followed by our Annual Dinner. The Conference theme was based on the Four Chaplains and how our Association of Fire Chaplains had their humble beginnings. Page 3 of this history has more historical information on the Four Chaplains. Also, please visit the Four Chaplains Memorial Foundation website at fourchaplains.org, to read on how the Four Chaplains legacy is continued every day.

We concluded our Conference with training on “Cancer in the NYS Fire Service”, by Fire Protection Specialist Timothy Graves, DHSES, Office of Fire Prevention & Control.

(Submitted by Chief Chaplain Thomas With)

2023 Conference May 21 – May 24, 2023

Conference Theme was “A Cry For Help”

The NYSAFC held their Annual Training Conference at the New York State Frederick L. Warder Fire Science Academy, Montour Falls NY. It was an informative Conference with Training from the “NYS Office of Mental Health” and “DHSES New York State Emergency Management”.

Registration was on Sunday afternoon followed by Dinner at the Academy. After Dinner an Executive Board Meeting was conducted with Chaplains’ Training and Refresher at Fire Academy Auditorium. Later on members did some “catching up with everyone” at the Fire Academy Cafeteria.

On Monday, our day began with a short Welcome to everyone by Chief Chaplain Thomas With. Garra Lloyd-Lester, from the NYS Office of Mental Health, Bureau of Emergency Preparedness & Response, did a presentation of “The Role of the NYS Association of Fire Chaplains and Social Connectedness”. Our Annual Memorial Service was hosted by the Odessa Wesleyan Church, followed by our Annual Dinner at the Glenora Winery Veraisons Restaurant.

Our Annual Meeting of the Association was held on Tuesday morning in the Auditorium of the NYS Fire Academy, with Elections and Swearing In of new Officers. After lunch there was a trip by the Chaplains and spouses to the “Corning Museum of Glass”, in Corning, NY.

We concluded our Conference on Wednesday morning with training on “The Role of ESF – 5: Information and Planning”, by Josh Hotaling, of the DHSES, NYS Office of Emergency Management, Planning Section, followed by lunch at the Fire Academy.

(Submitted by Chief Chaplain Thomas With)

2024 Conference May 19 – May 22, 2024

Conference Theme was “Let Your Light Shine!”

The May 19-22, 2024 Annual Training Conference was held at the Comfort Inn & Suites East Greenbush, 99 Miller Road, East Greenbush, NY. It was an informative conference with training from the Albany Veterans Administration, Dr. Joseph Hunter, Jack Curran, John Cannon, Albany County Sheriff’s Office, also our Annual Welcome, Memorial Service, and Annual Dinner.

The Incoming Chief Chaplain, Richard Bolster, made the theme of the Annual Conference “Let Your Light Shine!”

On Monday, our day began with a short Welcome to everyone, from Chief Chaplain Thomas With. Albany Veterans Administration had two presentations for us. The first one was an “Introduction to the VA” by Sean Tuckey and the second one was “Chaplain Involvement with Mental Health and Behavioral Health” by Rev. Bruce Swingle. Our Annual Meeting was held the same day in the afternoon. Business was conducted along with Nominations and Elections. The Spouses had a bus trip to Samascott’s Orchard Garden Market in Kinderhook, with lunch along with historical facts and comments from the driver Chaplain Michael Dell Valle of Shaker Road Fire Department.

Tuesday morning training started with John Cannon, NYS Funeral Director, Cannon Funeral Home, “From the Funeral Director Perspective”. John’s presentation provided the Chaplains with good direction along with many great questions! Then we had Dr. Joseph Hunter, Utica University, MSW Program Director & Director of the Suicide Prevention Center, and his topic was “Cultivating Hope in Caring Communities”. Dr. Hunter previously worked at the Albany Stratton Veterans Administration Hospital. His presentation dovetailed the two Albany Stratton VA presentations.

On Tuesday evening, we had our Annual Memorial Service at the FASNY Firefighters’ Home in Hudson, the Dedication of “The Sacred Chore” Quilt in the Home’s Chapel, followed by our Annual Dinner provided by the FASNY Firefighters’ Home. The outgoing Chief Chaplain Thomas With was presented with his Chief Chaplain’s Plaque and Dress Uniform Badge. Also, at the request of incoming Chief Chaplain Richard Bolster’s family, Richard was Sworn In by Village of Valatie Clerk Barbara Fischer.

We concluded our Conference on Wednesday morning with training on “Signs & Symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress”, by Jack Curran, Retired Fire investigator, Rensselaer County. Jack also was well received especially with questions of how to work through Post Traumatic Stress. Everyone was able to have a Box Lunch for onsite eating or for the trip back home to our loved ones!

List of Founding Members

**Present at the Firemen's Association of the State of
New York's Annual Meeting held on August 16, 1966
in Rochester, New York**

Rev. Robert A. Bromfield

Rev. John L. Brown

Rev. Robert H. Darling

Rev. Robert G. Field

Rev. Donald J. Gardner

Mr. D. W. Holmes

Rev. Vincent A. Kennedy

Rev. Harold F. Langley

Rev. Richard K. Muck

Rev. Robert E. Reisch

Mr. Edward J. Sitzman

Rev. John J. Steger

Mr. Henry Stillman

Rev. George L. Stowell

Rev. Eugene R. Weis

List of Charter Members

These nineteen members were present at the March 10th meeting in Albany, NY in which the charter was first discussed before being officially presented and recognized by the State of New York on May 29th 1967...

Rev. David W. Arnold
Rev. Robert A. Broomfield
Rev. John L. Brown
Rev. Robert Darling
Rev. Robert G. Field
Rev. Donald J. Gardner
Mr. D.W. Holmes
Rev. Vincent A. Kennedy
Rev. Richard K. Muck
Rev. William Muller
Mr. Floyd G. Nower
Rev. Robert E. Reisch
Rev. Robert Schroeder
Mr. Edward J. Sitzman
Rev. John J. Steger
Mr. Henry Stillman
Rev. George L. Stowell
Rev. Eugene R. Weis
Rev. Robert J. Winterkorn

List of Chief Chaplains

Rev. Vincent A. Kennedy August 16, 1966 - May 19, 1969	Wantagh FD
Rev. John L. Brown May 19, 1969 - May 7, 1972	Jordan FD
Rev. James F. Larkin May 7, 1972 – May 19, 1974	Maynard FD
Rev. Robert A. Bromfield May 19, 1974 – May 4, 1975	Fuller Road FD
Rev. Harold F. Langley May 4, 1975 – May 21, 1978	Island Park FD
Rev. Robert J. Winterkorn May 21, 1978 – May 3, 1981	Spencerport FD
Rev. Alan D. Carvalho May 3, 1981 – April 24, 1983	Port Jefferson FD
Rev. John Steger April 24, 1983 – May 12, 1985	Spencerport FD
Rev. Nelson R. Elliott May 12, 1985 – April 26, 1987	Centereach FD

Rev. Rocco Galitelli April 26, 1987 – April 25, 1989	Centereach FD
Rev. Stephen Kish April 25, 1989 – Feb. 26, 1990	Skaneateles FD
Rev. William Michatek Feb. 26, 1990 – April 28, 1992	Webster FD
Rev. Robert Thomas April 28, 1992 – April 26, 1994	Sherrill-Kenwood FD
Mr. Thomas Tobin April 26, 1994 – April 30, 1996	Port Washington FD
Rev. Gregory Brennan April 30, 1996 – April 28, 1998	Alleghany FD
Rev. Wayne Jagow April 28, 1998 – May 2, 2000	Wrights Corners FD
Mr. Jack Nunn May 2, 2000 – April 30, 2002	Alden FD
Rev. Daniel Bitsko April 30, 2002 – April 28, 2004	Smithtown FD
Deacon Edward Billia April 28, 2004 – April 24, 2006	Huntington Manor FD

Mr. William A. Miles April 24, 2006 – April 23, 2008	Sweeny Hose Co. #7 N. Tonawanda FD
Mr. Richard Holst April 21, 2008 – September 9, 2009	Huntington Manor FD
<i>*Line of Duty Death</i>	
Rev. Barrie-Lyn Foster September 27, 2009 – May 1, 2012	Aurelius FD
Mr. Kenneth Palmer May 1, 2012 – April 28, 2014	Mohawk FD
Rev. Kenneth Hessel April 28, 2014 – April 18, 2016	Westbury FD
Rev. Jim Van Houten April 18, 2016 – April 16, 2018	Walden FD
Mr. William Mayo April 16, 2018 - May 12, 2020	Plainview FD
Rev. Leon I. VanWie May 12, 2020 - April 24, 2022	Town of Watertown FD
Thomas F. With April 24, 2022 - May 20, 2024	Fuller Road FD (Colonie)
Richard Bolster May 20, 2024 - Present	Malone Callfiremen

Dates and Places -

Annual Meetings/Conferences

August 16, 1966	Rochester, NY (Seminar at FASNY)
March 10, 1967	Albany, NY
June 11, 1967	Kiamesha Lake, NY (Concord Hotel)
September 17, 1967	Albany, NY (Holiday Inn)
February 12, 1968	Albany, NY (Holiday Inn)
May 26-27, 1968	Herkimer, NY (Herkimer FD)
January 26-27, 1969	Albany, NY (Holiday Inn)
May 18-19, 1969	White Plains, NY (White Plains FD)
January 11-12, 1970	Baliston Spa, NY (Holiday Inn Saratoga)
May 3-4, 1970	Rochester, NY (Sheraton Inn MCVFA)
January 24-25, 1971	Marcy, NY (Maynard FD)
May 16-17, 1971	Plainview, NY (Plainview FD)
January 9-10, 1972	Hudson, NY (Royalton-Firemen's Home)
May 7-8, 1972	Alden, NY (Alden FD)
January 13-14, 1973	Marcy, NY (Maynard FD)
May 6-7, 1973	Onondaga Hill, NY (Onondaga Hill FD)
January 13-14, 1974	Albany, NY (Fuller Road FD)
May 19-20, 1974	Marcy, NY (Maynard VFD)
January 12-13, 1975	Onondaga Hill, NY (Onondaga Hill FD)
May 4-5, 1975	Nassau City, NY (Island Park FD, Rockville Center FD, and Plainview FD)
January 11-12, 1976	Earlville, NY (Earlville FD)
May 16-17, 1976	Rochester, NY (Holiday Inn MCVFA)
November 7-8, 1976	Skaneateles, NY (Skaneateles FD)
May 15-16, 1977	Alden, NY (Alden FD)
November 6-7, 1977	Kingston, NY (Kingston FD)
May 21-22, 1978	Plainview, NY (Plainview FD)

November 5-6, 1978	Albany, NY (Tom Sawyer Inn)
May 6-7, 1979	Rochester, NY (Holiday Inn)
November 4-5, 1979	Endwell, NY (Endwell FD)
May 4-5, 1980	Sherrill, NY (Sherrill - Kenwood FD)
November 2-3, 1980	Montour Falls, (State Fire Academy)
May 3-4, 1981	Plainview, NY (Plainview FD)
November 8-9, 1981	Ellicottville, NY (Ellicottville FD)
April 25-27, 1982	Skaneateles, NY (Skaneateles FD)
April 24-26, 1983	Alden, NY (Alden FD)
May 13-14, 1984	Rochester, NY (Holiday Inn MCFVA-Gates FD)
May 12-14, 1985	Centereach, NY (Centereach FD)
April 27-29, 1986	Skaneateles, NY (Skaneateles FD)
April 26-28, 1987	Albany, NY (Prof. Fire Fighters NY)
April 24-26, 1988	Alden, NY (Alden FD)
April 23- 25, 1989	North Merrick, NY (Merrick FD)
April 29-30, 1990	Oxford, NY (Oxford & Hamilton FD)
April 28-30, 1991	Rochester, NY (MCFFA)
April 26-28, 1992	Lockport, NY (Lockport FD)
April 25-27, 1993	Sherrill, NY (Sherrill - Kenwood FD)
April 24-26, 1994	Port Washington, NY (Port Washington FD)
April 23-25, 1995	Alden, NY (Alden FD)
April 28- 30 1996	Skaneateles, NY (Skaneateles FD)
April 13-15, 1997	Alleghany, NY (Alleghany FD)
April 26-28, 1998	Hudson, NY (FASNY Firemen's Home)
April 25-28, 1999	Niagara Falls, NY (Niagara Air Force Base)
April 30-May 2, 2000	Tappan, NY (Tappan FD)
April 22-24, 2001	Montour Falls, NY (State Fire Academy)
April 28-30, 2002	Smithtown, NY (Smithtown FD)
April 27-29, 2003	Montour Falls, NY (State Fire Academy)
April 26-28, 2004	Huntington, NY (Huntington Manor FD)

April 24-27, 2005	Montour Falls, NY (State Fire Academy)
April 23-26, 2006	Niagara Falls, NY (Niagara Air Force Base)
April 29-May 2, 2007	Montour Falls, NY (State Fire Academy)
April 21-23, 2008	Huntington, NY (Huntington Manor FD)
April 26-29, 2009	Montour Falls, NY (State Fire Academy)
April 18-21, 2010	Auburn, NY (Aurelius FD)
May 9-11, 2011	Montour Falls, NY (State Fire Academy)
April 29 - May 2, 2012	Little Falls, NY (Mohawk FD)
April 22-24, 2013	Montour Falls, NY (State Fire Academy)
April 27-30, 2014	Westbury, NY (Westbury FD)
April 19-22, 2015	Montour Falls, NY (State Fire Academy)
April 17-20, 2016	Walden, NY (Walden FD)
April 30-May 3, 2017	Niagara Air Reserve Station , Niagara Falls, NY
April 15-18, 2018	Plainview, NY (Plainview FD)
April 28 - May 1, 2019	East Greenbush, NY
April 26-29, 2020	Cancelled, due to COVID-19
August 15-18, 2021	Watertown, NY
July 17-20, 2022	Comfort Inn & Suites, East Greenbush, NY
May 21-24, 2023	Montour Falls, NY (State Fire Academy)
May 19-22, 2024	Comfort Inn & Suites, East Greenbush, NY