

What are the requirements for being licensed or ordained?

Each church will set its own standards. If you believe you are called to the ministry of a chaplain, let your church leadership know this, and ask them what you need to do to be licensed or ordained in your church. Let them know you are serious with your commitment and then go do what they say.

Most churches will require a combination of Bible education and practical ministry experience over a number of years. There should be an acknowledgement (bearing witness) from that church that you have a calling on your life for ministry.

If your particular fellowship's standards are unreachable for you, you may want to find another recognized organization in good standing in the general Christian community that offers licensing/ordination to get involved with. Vision International University also offers ordination.

How did I become a chaplain?

Please ask for a copy of my testimony.

How do you raise funds to be a chaplain?

Meet everybody you can and build relationship with them. Keep your vision

before them and pray to God for provision. When God guides, He provides.

Prison ministry is a hard ministry to raise funds for. Most people do not want to invest time or money into helping criminals.

What are the responsibilities of a chaplain?

For the Lead chaplain: one-on-one counseling, death notices, teaching, preaching, religious literature distribution, other faith referral and lots of administration

For other chaplains: keeping track of religious service attendance, attending administration meetings, ministering to guards and other law enforcement security agents, ministering to professional staff, i.e. clerks, counselors, wardens.

About Chaplain Art Lyons

Art Lyons has been working in prisons and jails since 1980 and was a chaplain for the San Diego Sheriff's Department for 17 years. Art is now the Executive Director of Re-Entry Prison & Jail Ministry (RPJM). RPJM provides resources for inmates re-entering society. Referrals are provided through ministries and organizations assisting Chaplains, Pastors, and family members who are working with inmates or ex-offenders.

Frequently Asked Questions About Becoming a Chaplain

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How can I get involved in Chaplaincy Work?

The best place to start is by contacting every correctional institution in your community and letting them know of your desire. Ask them who you need to talk to and list every name and phone number you can. Usually you will find there are a few dead ends. Keep at it. Many Supervising Chaplains are volunteers. All are busy, so persevere. (That is always the key element to this ministry.) Make your phone calls and follow-up every lead. Once you get to some one in charge, let them know you are willing to take any training they have available. Ask them to put you on their mailing list or on a waiting list. Remember that there is only so much opportunity out there. Chaplains cannot make up time slots and find room available to do services any time they want. If you are persistent you will get an opportunity, but it may take weeks or months, and sometimes years.

Are there education requirements to be a chaplain? If so, what are they?

There are many different institutions with as many different requirements for each. A lot of the standards are up to the Supervising Chaplain. You will find more of a consistent standard in State and Federal run prisons for paid chaplains. Most paying positions will require a

minimum of a Bachelor's Degree or Master's Degree and most will want you to have some Clinical Psychology. However, in State and Federal prisons, Volunteer Chaplain positions will tend to have a lot more variances, but most volunteer positions will require some Bible College.

There are not a lot of schools for training chaplains. Most education requirements are met by graduation from a Bible School or College. Anyone that has a B.A. in Pastoral Studies should meet the education requirements to be a chaplain. I encourage a minimum of one year (30 college credits) of Bible College or education in a related field to meet the entry-level requirements to obtain the title of "Chaplain". I will work with anyone who is willing to get involved in the process.

I work with a university called Vision International University. They offer a one-year, ten-course correspondent curriculum with a certificate in correctional ministry. There are a few other Christian organizations that offer similar instruction. VIU offers Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate degrees through correspondence courses. They also will give you credit for previous Bible classes and life experiences.

Are there opportunities to get involved in full-time paid Chaplaincy work?

Yes, but there are few paid chaplains. Most of the paid positions are in Federal and State prisons that hire a Supervisory Chaplain to oversee all the religious programming. This is usually an administrative position making sure that all the religious programming is running smoothly. Volunteers usually conduct most of the teaching and preaching. Chaplains do most of the spiritual one-on-one counseling.

There usually is no back door to come in, such as a correctional counselor. Counselors are counselors, and deal with non-spiritual issues. Paid Chaplains are required to cover a multitude of spiritual needs including religious needs outside of one's own faith. The usual way a Protestant Supervisory Chaplain will do this is by keeping a list of other faith representatives to refer the inmate to.

Do I need to be licensed or ordained?

Yes. Non-religious professionals in a correctional setting don't know what goes into ordaining someone, but they all believe that chaplains should be ordained. It is as important as a degree in education in their understanding.

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