



## History & Value of Correctional Chaplaincy

By Emmett Solomon

Founder of the Restorative Justice Ministry Network of Texas

[www.RJMNTexas.net](http://www.RJMNTexas.net)<sup>1</sup>



### Chaplains Were the First Treatment Providers

The Faith Community was first to send people to dungeons and jails to tend to the needs of prisoners. In the early 20th century those people came to be known as “chaplains.” That word was popularized in the military services. Usually, a chaplain was a “clergy” who was charged with overseeing a chapel. The word eventually broadened to be a person who ministers to people in specialized settings.

### Chaplains as Government Employees

When the government sent its troops to “out-of-the-way” places, it was charged with the responsibility to care for them, physically, mentally and spiritually. The chaplains were supplied by the government as were medical and mental health professionals. Using that same understanding, when governments incarcerate individuals in “out-of-the-way” lock ups, the governments also supply Correctional Chaplains for the same reasons the military does.

Following World War II, Correctional Chaplaincy became a recognized profession. Its primary professional organization is the American Correctional Chaplains Association. It is an

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<sup>1</sup> Emmett Webster Solomon Jr. (1936-2014) lived a notable life of service, retired Director of Chaplaincy for TDCJ, publisher of *Restorative Justice News* (formerly, *INFORMS*), and nationally recognized expert in the field of Criminal Justice Ministry. Solomon began jail ministry as a volunteer in 1955, after attending seminaries in New York, Kentucky and Fort Worth. He started as staff Chaplain in 1964 at the Huntsville Unit of the, then, Texas Department of Corrections. He completed five units of Clinical Pastoral Education and earned a Master’s Degree in Criminal Justice from Sam Houston State University. After 20 years as a Correctional Chaplain in Texas, he was promoted to the Director of Chaplain’s Office. After serving there for 10 years, he took early retirement and founded the Restorative Justice Ministries Network in 1993.

A clip from his obituary: He graduated from Hereford High School in Hereford TX in 1954, Bob Jones University in Greenville South Carolina in 1958. In 1958 he enrolled at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore Kentucky. After one year, he transferred to New York Theological Seminary in New York City. He was pastor at Wurtsboro Reformed Church of America and his family returned to Texas and enrolled to do graduate studies in Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth. During his first semester there, he was recruited to Huntsville to do a course of study at the Huntsville Unit in 1964. Chaplain Clyde Johnston supervised a training program for clergy called Clinical Pastoral Education. Following one year of CPE he began serving as a chaplain for the Texas Department of Corrections at the Central Unit in Sugar Land. In 1967 he was reassigned to the Eastham Unit by Dr. George Beto the Director of TDC. At Eastham he was the first resident Chaplain where he served until 1984. He and Jan raised their family at the Eastham Unit. In 1984-85 he served as Interim Pastor of the First Baptist Church in Lovelady. In 1985 he and his family moved to Huntsville. He became the second Director of Chaplains after the death of his mentor Clyde Johnston who was the First Director of Chaplains for TDCJ. After retirement he served for 20 years as Founder and Executive Director of the Restorative Justice Ministries Network housed in the First Baptist Church Educational Building. That organization published and mailed a Prison Ministry Trade Journal for 12 years. The journal was to network people who do ministry with prisoners, prisoner families, victims of crime and Criminal Justice Professionals. RJMN also sponsored 14 statewide Restorative Justice Ministry Conferences and dozens of regional conferences. During the last 8 years, RJMN has focused on the needs of the returning citizens who were being released from prison. Because of health issues he relinquished leadership of the Restorative Justice Ministries Network in 2013. ([www.ItemOnline.com/obituaries/emmett-webster-solomon-jr/article\\_f7f81d16-2508-57aa-9024-58e361f73ff0.html](http://www.ItemOnline.com/obituaries/emmett-webster-solomon-jr/article_f7f81d16-2508-57aa-9024-58e361f73ff0.html) accessed 4-25-15)

affiliate of the American Correctional Association. The ACA has developed standards for correctional institutions which include Correctional Chaplains to provide Pastoral Care and oversee the religious programming for an institution. Clergy are a part of modern institutional life as are doctors and lawyers.

### **Role of Correctional Chaplaincy Is a Difficult Role**

The role of the Correctional Chaplain is not fully understood by some of the prison staff. One of the difficulties is that some staff think it to be an “easy job.” Chaplaincy requires the absorption of pain in its personal interactions with the people who live and work in a “suffering system.” That is precisely why chaplaincy brings “healing.” The criminal justice system does not in general bring much healing, because the professionals who administer it try to do it in a very impersonal manner to avoid “the great pain” which is endemic to the system.

Henry G. Covert is the author of “Ministry to the Incarcerated” published by the Loyola Press in 1995. He says that in his 19 years in law enforcement before becoming a Correctional Chaplain, he never had a job that was as difficult as that of being a chaplain at a major prison.

Emmett Solomon, Former Director of Chaplains for TDCJ reports that in the early 70’s when Billy McMillan was promoted from Assistant Warden to Warden of the Eastham Unit, he began his first staff meeting by saying, “I want you to know that the most difficult job at this unit is being chaplain.” He paused for about 20 seconds for emphasis and then moved on to other issues.

### **Need For Chaplaincy Has Increased**

Correctional Chaplaincy has grown in importance year by year. Chaplains interface with the community at a much greater rate than any other person on an institution’s staff, therefore, the chaplain should be an adequate and well trained professional, who is appropriately compensated.

In the early 60’s Texas chaplains were classified in the State Classification System at a similar level as Assistant Wardens because of the high educational requirements associated with the position. In the early 80’s the leadership of TDCJ quit using the State Classification System as it was designed. Step raises were no longer used as merit increases. People employed after that time were kept at step one of the pay group in which they were classified. Of course it was only a matter of time until, wholesale reclassification became necessary. Most departments of the agency have gone through major reclassification; however, Chaplaincy has not yet been granted theirs.



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