

# Chaplain: 'It's every day, every week we call on these chaplains'

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Gaidos, who is retiring this month after serving in Clatsop County for more than a decade, describes his role as a "ministry of presence."

Rather than preaching or giving grandiose speeches, he simply shows up when called. He is there to soothe and offer tissues or food. He only talks religion if asked. His presence is often all people need.

"A lot of times, it's not that you do a whole lot," Gaidos said. "It's just that you are there."

### Called upon

Police chaplains respond with officers to every type of incident, from suicides to car accidents. Chaplains assist officers and the community through tough times.

Gaidos is one of a few people in the county who volunteer as chaplains. He volunteers through a Clatsop County Sheriff's Office program, although he offers service to all local police agencies.

Last month, the Sheriff's

Office swore in Alyson O'Connor to take over the program.

"It's every day, every week we call on these chaplains," Sheriff Tom Bergin said.

Chaplains offer an outlet for officers, Bergin said, but also allow officers to keep doing their jobs when they cannot stay to console a family member or victim.

Gaidos' background as a Portland Police officer helped immediately earn trust.

"Jerry being in law enforcement, he had an instant ability to connect with police officers and sheriff's deputies," Bergin said. "The confidence was built and then the program just blossomed from there."

### Experience

The day Gaidos retired from the Portland Police in June 2004, an Astoria Police officer shot and killed a man who was attacking him with a baseball bat in a narrow hallway.

As a result of the shooting, Astoria Police requested a crisis intervention team from Portland to debrief the two officers involved. Gaidos, a member of



Kyle Spurr/The Daily Astorian

Alyson O'Connor will take over Clatsop County's law enforcement chaplain role following Jerry Gaidos' retirement.

the team, was at the debriefing. Two weeks later, former Astoria Police Chief Rob Deu Pree asked Gaidos to be the department's chaplain.

"That's how I got started," Gaidos said.

Gaidos' first call as a chaplain was to the suicide of a deputy's wife. He recalls arriving

at the deputy's house scared to death. Attempting to console the deputy was a great education, he said, and his first experience with the ministry of presence.

"You go and you do whatever needs to be done to help the people get through that time," he said.

When a small plane crashed into a Gearhart home in 2008, killing two aboard the plane and three children in the home, Gaidos was tasked with providing solace for the responding officers and impacted community members. He stayed with surviving family members and spelled officers who were assigned to watch over those close to the crash.

"You are there to facilitate in any way you can," he said.

Just as he could rely on his law enforcement background, Gaidos said, the new chaplain brings similar experience.

O'Connor, the wife of an Oregon State Police trooper, has worked in Washington's Cowlitz County Sheriff's Office explorer program, worked as a cadet with Oregon State Police and as a firefighter with Lewis and Clark

Volunteer Fire Department and Knappa Fire District.

"I was surprised to learn about Alyson's police experience, which is a tremendous benefit," Gaidos said. "She has a unique side of being a police officer's wife, as well. She has some experience and expertise that I don't."

### Healing process

At the Seaside Police Department after Goodding's death in February, Gaidos stayed with the group of officers through the night. At one point, the officers decided they were going to escort Goodding from the hospital to the funeral home. In that moment, Gaidos said, he could see the officers went from feeling helpless to finally being able to do something for Goodding.

"Having something to do for a police officer is important because you are supposed to be fixing things, you are supposed to be taking charge of stuff, and they are in a situation that they have no control over," Gaidos said. "I could see that started a process toward healing for those guys."

# Tall tales: 'It's good to see the kids are learning how to write'

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Chavez also decided to make the couple brother and sister, rather than husband and wife. "If they were a couple and went camping, that would be weird," she explained.

"It's been enlightening," said Ron Meyer, another resident sitting across the cafeteria from Chavez and the Lampis, who was being interviewed by three young boys. "It's good to see the kids are learning how to write. I'm teaching them how to draw."

Meyer clutched a coloring book he made about the Golden Gate Bridge, which his father helped build, and which was incorporated into each of the kids' stories.

Next to Meyer sat local luminary Michael Foster, who



Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian

Second-grader Braeden Elder shows the illustration for his story to Clatsop Care Center resident Ron Meyer Wednesday. More photos online at DailyAstorian.com

founded Astoria High School Scholarship Inc., and has helped provide hundreds of scholarships to Astoria graduates. Next to Foster sat second-graders

Carter Barba and Isaac Johnson, who were both writing fictionalized accounts of Foster, which he said cast him as a superhero.

"It was fun," said Foster,



Photo by Scott Holmstedt

Local luminary Michael Foster, left, is interviewed by second-graders Carter Barba, center, and Isaac Johnson at Clatsop Care Center.

who was lost by the students' train of thought at times but excited to see their finished products. "It was very unique."

While initially uncomfort-

able with the seniors, Fruith said, her students couldn't wait to talk with their subjects by the third visit. The residents, she added, began to see the

postcards, tissue-paper flowers and other mementos they receive from students as sort of status symbols.

Fruith receives support from the Astoria Schools Foundation to bus her students to the care center. The Astor Parents Club brings in Sally Lackaff, a children's book illustrator who worked on "The Violet-Covered Teacup," to read to kids. Astor Elementary Principal Kate Gohr teaches Fruith's math classes so she can take her students to the care center. And Nancy Cook, a parent of one of the students and a writing instructor at Clatsop Community College, types the books up. The Astoria Schools Foundation also provides the money for the books to be published by students at Jewell School.

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