



The Ministry of Chaplains | An Interview with Tami Harris

August 24, 2024

Kurt Francom:

Have you ever tried to help youth with their mental health? That's a tricky road to travel. I have to tell you about an inspiring presentation we recorded with the one and only Jodi Moore. Yes, that life coaching Jodi Moore. A few years ago, she recorded a fantastic presentation covering topics like normalizing tough feelings with youth, a more positive understanding of stress, how to minimize shame, and mastering the skill set of empathy and better understanding anxiety. I want you to see this presentation as soon as you finish this podcast episode. You can go to [leadingsaints.org slash 14](https://leadingsaints.org/14) and this will get you access to the entire video library at no cost for 14 days. Jody's presentation is in the Mentally Healthy Saints library and you'll be a better leader or parent when you finish it. Again, go to [leadingsaints.org slash 14](https://leadingsaints.org/14) or check out the show notes for the link. Before we jump into the content of this episode, I kind of feel it's important that I introduce myself. Now, many of you have been around a long time. You're well familiar with my voice and with Leading Saints as an organization. But if you're not, well, my name is Kurt Francom and I am the executive director of Leading Saints and the podcast host. Now, Leading Saints is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping Latter-day Saints be better prepared to lead. And we do that through, well, content creation like this podcast and many other resources at leadingsaints.org. And we don't act like we have all the answers or know exactly what a leader should do or not do. But we like to explore the concepts of leadership, the science of leadership, what people are researching about leadership and see how we can apply them to a Latter-day Saint world. So here we go. I'm excited to welcome in Tami Harris, who works in military relations for the church. She works at downtown Salt Lake in the church office building and works in military relations focused on the 400 chaplains that we have across the

world. And that includes female chaplains. As you know, there's actually been a long history of female chaplains in the church, which she talks about. her being one of the first female chaplains in the church, and now we have military female chaplains. And we just dive into the history of Latter-day Saint chaplains, their roles, how they can be an asset to local leaders, and just the many dynamics and ways that the church encourages and services those chaplains who are doing such remarkable work. Listen to the stories in this interview that she shares that are so inspiring of ministering one-on-one through as a chaplain. And what can leaders learn, like bishops, Relief Society presidents, to really connect with individuals? What can we learn from chaplains and you'll benefit from the story and maybe weep a little bit as she tells some such inspiring story. So here's my interview with Tami Harris. All right, Tami, you've made it to the Leading Saints podcast. You said this is one of few podcasts you actually listen to.

Tami Harris:

I do. I just don't have time. It's true. And I, I'm not one of those people that walk and listen along the way because I've known someone who was hit by a car and killed because they weren't, they were listening and not paying attention.

Kurt Francom:

Please podcast responsibly, folks.

Tami Harris:

All right. That's in the back of my mind. So I do, I'm doing chores. Yeah.

Kurt Francom:

Or at least take one of your butt out if you're walking so you can hear the traffic. Wow. Wow. And so you work for the church. What's your official title for the church?

Tami Harris:

Chaplain Services Manager.

Kurt Francom:

chaplain services manager. And this is one, like, I don't think we mostly members realize there's this, this machine behind the scenes, you know, especially with chaplains or military relations. Is that, is there like an umbrella department?

Tami Harris:

So it's military relations and chaplain services is the division. Okay. And it's under the umbrella of the priesthood and family department.

Kurt Francom:

Gotcha. So what in those military relations, what are some other roles or departments going on?

Tami Harris:

So there's a military relations manager. And so he takes care of and is responsible for like the lay leaders that and installations where there's not a chaplain and helps vet them and get them set up and ready to serve. And then also veterans helping provide for their needs upon return and then military families as well. So we overlap because obviously they're military chaplains. That's my lane. He's military. That's his lane. So there's overlap. Yeah. With what we do.

Kurt Francom:

So in military relations, how many employees are there, would you say?

Tami Harris:

Oh, employees?

Kurt Francom:

Yeah.

Tami Harris:

So we have six employees and then we have an army of incredible volunteers. Yeah. We have two interns, so they're part-time and then 30 service missionaries, some full-time missionaries. And then throughout the world, we have military relations missionaries on installations. Wow.

Kurt Francom:

And what's the, I mean, where's the good starting point as far as putting this all in the context? Like, I mean, once you realize it's the military relations, it's obvious, of course, the church would have a military relations department or focus. But was there a starting point of it? Or do most churches have this type of dynamic happening?

Tami Harris:

They have endorsers that endorse military personnel. I mean, people to become chaplains, which would then include your staff officer, your military personnel. But as for military relations committees or departments or chaplains, like, I don't know, I've not heard of that either. But it was started with the church about 75 years ago. The first presidency wanted a military advisory committee or military servicemen committee to be able to advise them on the needs of military personnel and chaplains wherever they may be. And so that's kind of where it started. Very first chaplain was Elias Kimball. So he's not very well known. His brother, Jay Golden, Oh, okay. Yeah, sure. But Elias was not very well known, but was asked to be a chaplain for the Spanish-American War. And so, I think he, if I'm remembering correctly, left being a mission leader to go do that. And he did, and it was a very short war, but he's our very first Latter-day

Saint chaplain. And I did not know that until a few years ago because he's my great-great uncle. I had no idea that's part of what he did. And my focus had been more on Jay Golden Kimball because he's just so fun. And I had some personal family history with him and letters to my grandma and things like that. Anyway, so he's the very first, not very well-known. The three that are considered the first by most people, see, I wrote down their names, so I made sure I would get it right. So, BH Roberts, Calvin Smith, who's Joseph F. Smith's son, Joseph F. Smith's son. Actually, I think it's Joseph. Why do I have to look that up? Or you're going to have to look that up. It's either Joseph Fielding Smith or Joseph F. Smith.

Kurt Francom:

That's an invitation to the audience. Maybe they can look it up.

Tami Harris:

And then Herbert Moss. So during World War I, they were our Latter-day Saint chaplains. And then they would advise the first presidency as well during that time, even though I don't think there was an official servicemen's committee or anything like that. So today it's called the Military Advisory Committee and it's made up of senior military leaders and chaplains, or just senior military leaders, and a few others who have great interest and careers that have worked closely with military personnel.

Kurt Francom:

So this is a council within the church. These are all LDS, Latter-day Saints.

Tami Harris:

called by the first presidency to fulfill these roles. They meet twice a year. Along the way, of course, they're back and forth engaging email, you know, there may be meetings online, things like that. There's also a chaplain advisory committee. And this is fairly new. This was just started in 2021, 22. And were called through the 70 and set apart. Like for me, it was Elder Yagi of the 70. So, we take care of chaplaincy matters, advise, for instance, the chaplain guidebook that I mentioned that needed to be rewritten. It was very out of date. So, then we put it forth and it goes through the clearing process and vetting and correlation and all of those things. The exciting thing about it this time is it has a First Presidency message. So I think so many people didn't realize the First Presidency knew about them or that they weren't seen because it is so unusual, you know, to be a chaplain. In the 1960s when my father was, there were only 15 and now there are almost 400. So it's grown a lot. So at that time, the church, you know, like it was, President Hugh B. Brown, who actually talked to my dad about becoming a chaplain, he'd been a prison chaplain at the time at the Utah State Prison, asked him to consider military chaplaincy, there was a need or headed into Vietnam. And so, they were very well aware of where the chaplains were and who they were when they're 15. Yeah. That's easy to follow.

Kurt Francom:

So, were there a bunch more like I'm thinking during World War II when we had so many deployed or?

Tami Harris:

We had 45 in World War II and then that went way down after World War II and then started to build back up again.

Kurt Francom:

Wow. And now there's about 400.

Tami Harris:

Yeah. But those who are civilians can now be, or federal chaplains can now be endorsed by the church as well. And that endorsement didn't take place until 2014. The policy changed. Before then, it was only military chaplains would be endorsed, centrally endorsed by the church. And now all chaplains can. Healthcare, prison, federal, educational, corporate. Interesting. So that makes the numbers grow.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. So, take me that because I'm not a military guy. I don't know much about it as far as the inner working. So, just talk to me, explain what is a chaplain generally in the military? And I assume they've existed since the beginning of the military.

Tami Harris:

George Washington had chaplains. Oh, cool. Actually. Yeah. Yeah. He had chaplains. It's a great story about that if we have time later on. So, they really meet the needs of the military personnel and their families, their spiritual needs. So for instance, the Latter-day Saint chaplains endorsed by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, they held true to their faith. They should be well grounded in their own doctrine. That's what the military wants as well. In fact, one of the chaplains who visited recently, the chief of chaplains for the army, Chaplain Greene said, we don't want a Latter-day Saint chaplain that's trying to be an evangelical chaplain. You know, we want them to be a Latter-day Saint chaplain. If we wanted a Protestant chaplain, we would have accessioned another Protestant chaplain. So I thought that was great to hear from him, like, be who you are, but you minister to everyone. You minister to everyone.

Kurt Francom:

So like a unit would have a one chaplain per unit or... No, it's... Yeah, it just depends.

Tami Harris:

Just depending on the need. Right. Okay. So there are pockets of areas of the world where we have several Latter-day Saint chaplains, and then we don't at all in other areas. And it just depends on where the military sees the need to move Them.

Kurt Francom:

Gotcha. So there may be a Latter-day Saint who's part of some unit somewhere and they may be the only Latter-day Saint. And so there may not be a chaplain that he can interface with. However, there is some form of a chaplain, maybe a Catholic chaplain. If he's going through a tough time or just needs to connect or have a spiritual discussion, he can turn to that individual and they work that out.

Tami Harris:

And hopefully there would maybe be a district leader or a district or a mission, something like that.

Kurt Francom:

Like the local church. Right. Yeah.

Tami Harris:

But not necessarily. I mean, depending on where they are. So yeah, so that Catholic chaplain would be able to serve our Latter-day Saint chaplain as well. Wouldn't necessarily understand doctrine, but you're having a rough time. They would be trained in, you know, psychological first aid, crisis ministry. So they would be able to help.

Kurt Francom:

And so, these chaplains, did you mention there's like different kinds of chaplains in the military?

Tami Harris:

No, military chaplains are military. I mean, there are, I mean, of course, right. Navy and Air Force and Reserves and National Guard and Army. But on a civilian side, you know, there's hospice and hospital and educational and corporate and prison and things like that.

Kurt Francom:

So, there can be just a civilian who is a chaplain? They have no military rancor experience.

Tami Harris:

Oh, okay. Yeah. So, since 1989 until 2021, when I came to help at the church office building, I was a chaplain in a subacute psychiatric setting for youth. And so, that was my whole time as a

chaplain was in two different facilities, working with adolescents who were struggling and it was a joy. Yeah. That was a joy to do that. Interesting.

Kurt Francom:

So chaplain, I imagine there's certain standard as far as education and things that need to be acquired to be approved as a chaplain.

Tami Harris:

Right. But it depends on what the hiring facility or agency needs or wants or requires. Okay. So for instance, the gold standard is typically a graduate degree in chaplaincy, theology, or divinity, or perhaps crisis ministry. Then there's four units of clinical pastoral education and board certification. That's the gold standard. But along the way, some facilities are like, actually we just need someone that has the clinical pastoral education, or we need someone trained in crisis ministry, or you clear them as the endorser and we will train them on what we need them to do for the facility. But that's the gold standard and to work in a hospital, it's typically at least an undergraduate degree and two units of clinical pastoral education with the promise and contract that you'll finish like in two years or whatever it may be with the additional two units. Yeah.

Kurt Francom:

And then, so of those 400 chaplains, is that their full-time job?

Tami Harris:

For some, it's their full-time job and for others, they're volunteering. So, we may have someone who's retired as a military chaplain and they've been asked, and this has actually happened recently, they've been asked by a city to be the chaplain for their police and fire department. And so, they're actually ministering to police and the fire and then maybe at the scene of whatever it may be at times. So, that's volunteer, but he has a lot of training because of his military background.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. And every chaplain has to be endorsed by an official religion? Is that?

Tami Harris:

Military chaplains, yes. Everyone else, it depends. They typically like to see that. So, healthcare chaplains, this is why they like to see it because then they have confidentiality privileges, right? And there's some legal ramifications there. So, if you're just volunteering and because you're a nice person and you want to help out, you don't necessarily have training and you don't necessarily have backing, necessarily endorsed, then who says, yes, they can do this. And therefore, because they're appointed by their church to be able to do X, Y, Z, that they can do X, Y, Z. So it really helps with confidentiality.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. Yeah. Now, a few years ago, it was newsworthy that the church, our church approved for female chaplains. Is there a story behind that? Yeah, sort of.

Tami Harris:

So, that it was a huge story because it was the first time they could become military chaplains. Yeah. So, again, I started in 1989, but I didn't know anybody. And my story was my dad was a chaplain. He'd retired from the military, was at the Utah State Hospital and had been diagnosed with cancer and given two months to live. It metastasized to his brain before he ever even found it. And so he kept, he gave up that position, but he was also working at a youth facility, the sub acute psychiatric facility and kept going. And five months later, six months later, dad's still alive. We're at the seven month mark. And it's like, I'm starting to get weak. And so he called me one Saturday and he said, I'm not sure how much longer I can do this. They haven't found anybody else. I've wanted to keep doing as long as I can, but Do you think maybe you could come with me tomorrow and I could introduce you to the youth and the staff and show you where, because it was always to conduct the interfaith worship service and then to meet with kids as needed and provide some pastoral care. So I'm like, sure, dad, because I'd been a mentor of youth from my youth and I would always worked in young woman or teaching Sunday school to the youth. I'd gone to Catholic Vacation Bible School growing up and processed the chapel and non-denominational services. So I knew the drill. Like I knew what that service would look like and I knew the music and I just, sure, I could pull it off. And I wanted to help my dad. So I go with him that Sunday and he does that. He introduces me to everyone. And then he dies on Tuesday.

Kurt Francom:

Oh my goodness.

Tami Harris:

I know. Wow. Yeah. It was remarkable. It was just, Unbelievable.

Kurt Francom:

You just picked up where you left off.

Tami Harris:

Yeah. And so the facility said, please keep coming. We're trying to find someone else. This was in the late 80s. And there weren't as many chaplains as there are now. And trying to find someone that could meet the needs that have experienced perhaps or Anyway, they just were having a rough time. So, I'm like, sure, I'm happy to help out. So, I did that for three months and then they found somebody and then that person said, I need her to keep coming. I don't want to be here every single Sunday. So, I'll do two weeks of the month and then she can be like the

relief chaplain and do the other two weeks and we'll just do that. And so, I continued to do that and just would teach, preach how I would if I was a seminary teacher or if I was teaching a Relief Society lesson. I'd find myself thinking, Should I be doing this?

Kurt Francom:

We've all been there as leaders.

Tami Harris:

Is this okay? Because I didn't know of any woman who was a Latter-day Saint chaplain. I mean, I'd wanted to be a seminary teacher, but back then, like, that wasn't... And this wasn't a military dynamic, right?

Kurt Francom:

No, not a military dynamic. Your father had been a military chaplain, but this was... But this was a civilian.

Tami Harris:

Oh, gotcha. Yeah, a civilian opportunity. So, but I thought, who do I ask? And then I, and so I'm running through my mind, I'm kind of praying about this and pondering about it, because I don't want to, I never wanted to do anything outside propriety or policy or lanes. And so, I thought, well, I probably should just call the church and see if it's okay that I do this. This was actually a couple of years later because for a while, I just, I'm just subbing. Yeah, just helping out. No big deal. But after five years, that person quit. And so, then they said, we'll offer you the position and we'll waive a master of divinity. You have five years experience with us. So, will you do it? And I said, yeah, because I thought, well, it's just going to two weeks to four weeks. But then it was like, should I be doing this? Like, I don't know. So I thought I'll just call and ask someone at the church and then really clearly into my mind came don't ask, just do it right. Wow. And I pondered on that and I thought, I will just do it right. And so, which I felt like I was already, I'd let my bishop and stake president know what I was doing all the way along, you know, the path there and the time there. By now, my husband had been released from being a bishop and he was in a stake presidency to back to back for the next 18 years. And that gave me face time with general authorities and things where we'd have the dinners.

Kurt Francom:

And was this in Salt Lake or? Provo.

Tami Harris:

So, they would inquire, you know, what do you do? What do you do? And so, I would mention that I was a chaplain and there would be this keen interest, you know, and I just would tell them

what I did and I would just be me. And there was never a, I don't know, there was not ever a vibe like that, right? It was just very interest, a kind keen interest.

Kurt Francom:

So you were a chaplain according to that facility, but it's not like you needed to go out and seek an endorsement. You had a membership in the church, so that was good enough.

Tami Harris:

They actually required a letter from my stake president or my clergy leader saying that I was a member in good standing. That's what they wanted. So that was what was being required.

Kurt Francom:

Ecclesiastical endorsement. Right.

Tami Harris:

But stake presidents and bishops aren't to do that now because we have centralized endorsement.

Kurt Francom:

Anyone out there, if you're hearing this, if you're doing that, you do need to call it a draw.

Tami Harris:

38.9 of the handbook. Love it. So, I was using that and it was just asked for initially and then, you know, once I had it, it didn't matter to them. I just kept letting my leaders know what I was doing. Change of bishops, you know, we get a new stake president, Randy's called into that stake presidency, but I just wanted to make sure that he knew what I was doing. And I was just trying to do everything as a faithful Latter-day Saint woman and a Latter-day Saint member. And so, Someone wanted to do a meeting with me and they said, we hear that you're the first Latter-day Saint woman chaplain. I said, I believe so. I've been doing this, you know, 15, 16 years now. I've never met anyone or heard of anyone else that's doing this. And so I said, but let me check. I'll call the church and see if I am. And so I did. And I talked to the director, Frank Claussen, He retired a few years ago. But I said, is this accurate that I'm the first Latter-day Saint woman chaplain for the church? And he said, yeah, it's you. Oh, wow. Yeah. Well, but it's not. We found out in 2022 that Emmeline B. Wells, who was a General Relief Study president, was a chaplain with Utah Pioneers. Oh, okay. In 1889. So, 100 years later, I come along. Yeah.

Kurt Francom:

So you're the second chaplain, or were there others?

Tami Harris:

Yes, there were others as well. Nice. I love it. And we had a woman chaplain in the Utah Senate, and her name escapes me right now, but she was the very first woman chaplain in any Senate, state Senate, anywhere in the United States. Oh, wow. Yeah. And she's a Latter-day Saint. Wow.

Kurt Francom:

That's some fascinating history.

Tami Harris:

I didn't know anything about that until Dawn Dimmick, who's our very first army chaplain, was finishing up her capstone project, and it was on the history of Latter-day Saint women chaplaincy, and uncovered this. And it was so fun to be able to share this with the chaplains in 2023 at last year's conference, because they had thought so as well. That had been the story, is that it's Tami Harris, but it wasn't. And to know that there's this disleavage of others who came before me, it's just very gratifying and beautiful.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. So, there had been civilian female chaplains for years and years. And this sort of newsflash was more that there had been approval for military female chaplains.

Tami Harris:

Right. Except we lost them. We didn't know who these women were. And so, we kind of lose track of them in the late 40s until I come along in 89. Oh, okay. their histories, their stories, their journals may surface, but we don't know about them yet. So, that's why I think it was thought was it's just Tami Harris. It's me. And so, anyway, so then the policy changed for all chaplains, all introducing chaplains to be able to be endorsed in 2014, but it's 2015 before it actually started happening. You know, policy changes, but it's like, how are we going to do this? And we're going to make it work. And let's get the paperwork going. And what does that look like? And all of those things.

Kurt Francom:

So from inside the church office building, and it was that a big thing? I mean, was it something that needed to come from the first presidency? Or was it more of like, let's just formalize this and

Tami Harris:

But well, it had to go through, you know, all of the steps, but it was never announced, which was very shocking to me. And remember years ago, they did the I am a Mormon blog. Oh, yeah. So,

my husband, he said, you really need to do that. I don't know. I just, I really, they kept pushing me on. I thought, okay, I'll do it. And so I did. And that was the same year that in fact, I had just had the call in a phone call that this policy had changed. And so it was pretty exciting. And I thought they're going to announce it probably in October at the conference, not the general conference, but the annual chaplain conference, annual chaplain training seminar. This is what we call it now. So anyway, I thought, okay, maybe I'll do it. And so I did. And again, I mentioned that I was the first Latter-day Saint woman chaplain, because that's what I've been told. And it went viral. That story went crazy. It was picked up everywhere. I mean, it hit the I'm a Mormon blog and then it was picked up everywhere. So that was big back then, but it was the military chaplaincy for women was just huge in 2021, that policy change.

Kurt Francom:

Oh, that was 2021. Oh, okay. Nice.

Tami Harris:

But we didn't necessarily, we had people coming down the pike for that, but not necessarily ready to be accessioned. So Jenna was first, Don for Air Force, Don Demick first for Army, Sierra Larson will be first for Reserves. We have people that are in BYU program right now that are ready for Navy. It's a thing now. Yeah. That's cool. It's such a blessing to be a part of this.

Kurt Francom:

Cool. So what would you say, like, what is the day-to-day type of things that you're dealing with, with chaplains or how, like, what is the church providing chaplains and working with?

Tami Harris:

So every year we have an annual chaplain training seminar and it's, it's huge to pull that off. It takes six months of planning in Salt Lake or in Salt Lake. It's the conference center. It's the church office building. It's the Relief Society building. This year we're doing everything in the conference center. So we use the little theater and then we have, there's many areas in the conference center for breakout sessions and leadership training. And you would never know that because you just see the big area. Yeah. So, it's all going to be there this year because- Does everybody fly in, all the chaplains or- Chaplains fly in, drive in. For those who can't, it's a requirement of endorsement really for all of the chaplains, but we're able to provide some of the sessions virtually so that they can watch those. They'll be up for about a week and then after that, the transcripts. But for our military chaplains especially, it seems to be not only tradition, but really needed. I can't imagine not going myself and just trying to watch it. There's too many distractions. And when you're there and you feel it and you're being taught by senior leaders and fellow chaplains and you hear stories and you're inspired, it fills my cup. Yeah. For the rest of the year.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. It's really great. Wow. And so that, that's, uh, you're always sort of planning for the next one.

Tami Harris:

But then we have also like online conference calls, trainings, things like that, that we do. Um, we're trying to do more of those. I would like to see those. So this is my, I'm into like my 17th month of this position. And so I want to put together additional trainings that maybe this might be specifically for our public safety chaplains, but we can let everybody know. And if they have an interest, then they can come on and be a part of it as well in a team's meeting or on zoom, something like that. And then it's fielding calls that the vetting of chaplains. So someone is, I'm interested in chaplaincy. Can you tell me about it? Taking those calls, having those meetings, or they've reached a point where they're serious, they feel the call from God that this is what they need to do. And that call is vital that they feel like the Lord has been working in their lives to call them to this because when they're, especially speaking to military personnel, when they're deployed and they're far from home and they're in harm's way and they don't have anyone around that is familiar to them, perhaps they have to know, come what may, this is where God needs them to be. Otherwise, when everyone else is freaking out and the chaplain freaks out too, that's really horrible. Like the chaplain, this really needs to be the calm and loving presence in situations. And so, you know, that's really important that they see that call. And our commanders, the chief of chaplains, non-Latter-day Saints have both said that same thing in the past year to me and to others of like, just they've got to have And we need more chaplains, they'll say, but we want them to be better prepared. So we try to really prepare them along the way. And a lot of that's got to be their own work as well. They've got to be physically prepared, mentally prepared, emotionally prepared, spiritually prepared.

Kurt Francom:

So, there can be somebody, male or female, who's maybe coming off a mission and looking for their career, they can say, I'm going to get a master's degree and be a chaplain at a hospital or as a civilian chaplain and just go do it. And that's a very viable path, right?

Tami Harris:

Yes, but they should start with our office first. Especially if they just are off a mission and they want to become a military chaplain. So, we'll stick with that for a minute. They need more life experience. The sweet spot for a military chaplain is like late twenties, early thirties. So for them to have some life experience on a mission, but maybe they're not married yet, they don't have a family yet, their parents are still living, they haven't experienced a death, they've never gone to a funeral in their life. All of those things that they may be doing and providing, they've not even seen before. They need life experience.

Kurt Francom:

Gotcha. So there may be somebody who, let's say they've been, they decide I'm going to become a therapist, do the therapy, they raise a family, they maybe in their forties, fifties, they

think, all right, now I'm going to transition to being a chaplain. And it's sort of a, maybe more rewarding change in their career path that, yeah, I still get to do the mental health thing or be there for people, but I'm going to do this in a different way at a hospital or, or in the military, if that's your path.

Tami Harris:

So military, they may be too old. There are age waivers. They still have to be able to keep up physically with the youngsters and the pushups and all that. But definitely I still have seen that. They may be in their late 30s. I don't want to be a pilot anymore. I want to be able to help people and serve them in a different way. And we see that in healthcare as well. I feel like this is the path that I was brought to this point and now it's time for me to serve in a different way. There's a big difference though, between like, let's say our ministry, like we have no bishop and stake president or even pastor, um, a leader of another congregation. They're meeting with someone and it's often very directive. This is your problem. You've mentioned it. So this is what I need you to do. Right. And they lay out the things that they need them to do. But a chaplain, it's very reflective. And so, they listen, listen, listen. And along the way, with little nuggets that come up, they may say, tell me more. So, it's not directive at all. And if they've been directive, if they're coming, for instance, as a pastor, I often teach chaplains before this last 17 months. Those who want to be chaplains, I have taught clinical pastoral education. So I've been an educator. And so if they're coming from a pastoral experience where they've been, you know, the lead pastor for their church, that's so hard for them to not just want to dispense advice and to tell someone just next time, by the time I come back, I want you to have read the first three books of whatever it may be. And it's the same with our own faith leaders. Sometimes if they've had a lot of

Kurt Francom:

They've been the Bishop or whatever, the Relief Society President. Yeah.

Tami Harris:

But everybody can learn. It's just different. It's just different.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. So take me there. Like if you're in a room full of Bishops, Relief Society Presidents, and, you know, we, we have these ministering interviews or a Bishop's got his office and he's meeting with people and they want to be, have a better pastoral care in their approach to just being that, that leader. Is there a crash course you could give us on some things to think about?

Tami Harris:

Well, that's not wrong necessarily for the pastoral role. It's really not. It's just wrong for the chaplain.

Kurt Francom:

Right. So I'm asking, what can we bring from the chaplain role?

Tami Harris:

So as a chaplain, when they bring something up, like honestly, those three words are gold. Tell me more. Oh yeah. Right. Those are just gold. And I've heard you say that in your podcast as well.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. They are powerful.

Tami Harris:

Yeah. But also then listening to the spirit, which I believe they're doing to know where they need to go with something. where it may not just be tell me more, but tell me about X, Y, Z. So for instance, once I had a very dysregulated and I noticed a pattern where she would just fall apart during birthday parties. I mean, slamming, yelling, hurting herself, others, punching, I mean, just very dysregulated. And so, like, the second or third time this took place as I'm meeting with her and just listening to the rage, because a chaplain will just sit beside someone and let them rage, you know? And she kind of took a breath. Let's say her name was Susie. Susie, tell me about birthdays when you were growing up. That just came into my mind. I feel like it was just a gift that day from the Spirit to just ask her that, right? And so she kind of stopped and she said, Well, and then she went on to tell me that she didn't ever have a birthday party and her birthday was never acknowledged and she never had a cake, a present, nobody ever sang happy birthday to her. So this was all grief, right? That she was experiencing and grief and rage often are cousins. And so for me to understand that and to listen to her tell of her loss and the things she never had, sometimes we think of losses, was taken away. But when you never have it, that can be a loss as well.

Kurt Francom:

I would imagine, like, in my experience, the temptation is, you know, and this you learn in parenting as well, like, let's put it in the context of a church leader experience where maybe you're at a girls camp or a youth activity and something happens, some drama, there's a triggering event that kind of sends somebody into, like, they lose that, as you said, they have a dysregulated moment, right? They have emotion just spilling, they're maybe angry or raging, right? Naturally, we want to like put it back together and move on. Like, hey, we're at girls camp. You can't act like this. You can't yell at me. Hey, you're swearing now. Don't swear. Right. We almost want you get over here. You apologize. Right. Like you want to fix it and make it all go away. Right. No. Right. And so I've just tried to lean in. And again, sure. These individuals probably need professional counseling and we'll get to there. Right. But in the moment, just to be able to pull that person aside and sit in their rage, tell me more, you know, and one of the most powerful things I say as a Bishop that helps so many people is this Bishop's office is so special because you can come in here and you can swear all you want. You can yell if you want, and I'll just sit here and listen to you. Right. And for a lot of people, they just need that to

process that experience, even though it could sound, you know, really hard to listen to at times, right?

Tami Harris:

Trying to put the music in the hallway. That's right. Oh, that's so true. I remember thinking, I don't care how angry they are, even if they're really, really angry at God, they still believe, right? They still believe. If I can work with that, if someone is like, that's it, and they close off and there's no communication with God anymore. So even if it's angry, like I could work with that and that would be fine. They would settle down. It was a moment. I'm sure the Lord's looking at him thinking, I know, sweetheart, this is really hard. And you are so upset. And that happened, you know, wasn't fair. And I just love you and go ahead and yell, you're going to feel better. Like I just picture him being that loving father that would be like,

Kurt Francom:

Because the biggest tragedy is when they have to do that alone. And that's where it can really go negative, right? Where they're harming themselves or don't have anybody to really hear them. So just to be that person, I'm just going to create this space. Like, sure. Like, let's hear it. Tell me more. Right.

Tami Harris:

Yeah. So, when she told me all that and I could say, guess what? Here, everybody gets a birthday party and you're gonna get pizza too and ice cream and cake and a present. Well, my parents won't send it. No, we do. It's the coolest thing. You get to put what you want. It was like, Huge, right? Mind-blowing to her that that would be provided for. I guess she wasn't noticing who was bringing in the ice cream or whatever. Her life changed. Yeah. That simple little thing. There were other things that she was just regulated over, of course, but this was like the startup. My life doesn't always have to be the way it was. Yeah.

Kurt Francom:

And that again, that chaplain could be that person in the moment who suddenly that person has a positive experience where like, I trust them a little bit more. I can bring things to them and they don't shame me or right.

Tami Harris:

And they're not afraid.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah, they're not afraid of my problems or me.

Tami Harris:

They shouldn't be. they shouldn't be afraid of what they hear or who they're with. I would go into situations that were potentially violent and dangerous. I just felt a shield of protection that this was me. I'm not saying this is it for everyone, but I just like, I knew it would be okay. And it was. 33 years in this environment and never, ever heard or made afraid or thought I need to leave or anything. Yeah.

Kurt Francom:

Any other advice from a chaplain to bishops really setting presences as far as how to be better ministers or whatever it is that to be a better spiritual chaplain?

Tami Harris:

Have a game face, like have a poker face. Yeah. Because if they know that you've been shocked or alarmed or that you're disgusted, right, grossed out by something they've said, I especially think this of youth with their leaders, like they're so keen on the vibe that they're getting. And if it's just like just nodding and listening, no matter how ugly it is, even though you're like, I'm going to have to do some therapy on my own. It's so changing for them because they have been shamed and they have had horrible things happen to them. But once they can tell someone about it, it starts to release the pressure and hold that that horrible experience has had on them. And they mean to tell it over and over. And that can be really helpful. You may not ever want to hear it again, but you can. And if you do, it's so helpful to them and can be so healing. But then also telling them, I want you to write it out. And then we're going to, we're going to have this little thing that we do together and we're going to burn it when you're ready. And we're going to let go and we're going to watch those flames ascend along with the smoke ascending. And we're just turning it over to the Lord. That's that visual of you're just letting it go and letting it go to God. I worked with non-Latter-day Saint youth for most of those years. I had very few, even though this was in Utah, but very few youth that were Latter-day Saints. I had to do things from their perspective and from their tradition that would make sense to them. And this is one of those things.

Kurt Francom:

Right. And so the chaplain isn't, it's not like you wear a, you know, the symbol of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. You're, you're a chaplain with a Latter-day Saint background type of thing, but you're, you can show up for anybody.

Tami Harris:

You're a Latter-day Saint chaplain and you are, for the longest time, I thought, no, I'm an interfaith chaplain who happens to be Latter-day Saint, but that's actually not correct. Oh, okay. I'm a, first of all, I'm a child of God, right? Exactly. All those things. But I am, I'm endorsed by the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. So therefore I hold to those tenants. But as a part of that, I help anyone in need. Now let's say they have, they need the Eucharist. They're Catholic and they were, they're requesting the Holy Eucharist or confession with a priest or something. I can't be like, listen, here, I can take care of that. I got these last week. They were left behind.

We'll do this. I can pull up the prayer online. No, totally inappropriate to do that. In fact, I could lose my endorsement over something like that. But as chaplains, you're to make friends with the interfaith community and a military installation, you're going to know others. And then if they don't have them there, we'll often bring them in, they'll contract for individuals to come on to the installations to be able to provide specific things. Well, with me, it was no different. I had volunteers, clergy volunteers that would come in to provide, for instance, two times a month, the Eucharist and wonderful, wonderful women, dear friends to this day who would provide that. Eucharistic ministers who would do that. I would occasionally be able to have a priest come on and they would be able to hear confession. If they wanted an evangelical service, then I had a friend who I could You know, it's like just different things like that.

Kurt Francom:

You have a network of resources.

Tami Harris:

Rabbi Benny Zippel, I worked with him for decades with bringing Jewish services and opportunities and celebrations to the youth. And then he would often say, okay, you are now the junior rabbi, and this is how I'm going to tell you to help with the service to facilitate it. Because I could facilitate most anything with, okay, here are the foods, they're kosher, you're going to give the prayer, and you're going to, right? But I wouldn't do it myself.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah, you're under the direction of that leader.

Tami Harris:

Yeah, I would bring it together under the direction of the rabbi to facilitate what these youth needed. And there would have to be variations on things as well because certain facilities, you can't have certain things like fire, for instance. So candles and stuff often weren't allowed. Sometimes they were just kind of dependent, but that's okay. We could make allowances and do things different with electric candles or whatever it may be. But I was providing opportunities and I was providing the space and the food and things like that. But others were, excuse me, were leading.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. What would you say, like, what do just everyday lay leaders in the church need to understand about chaplain services? Because it seems like, oh, that's cool. That's happening. Doesn't really impact me. You know, I'm not a military guy. This isn't a military war or anything. Anything that you would want that general body of leaders to understand?

Tami Harris:

The chaplains in your wards and stakes can be a huge help to you. Like they consider them an asset. They are trained in so many things that perhaps you haven't been trained in that they could help with. So for instance, a chaplain can marry anyone where a bishop can only marry, you know, officiate in the wedding of someone in there where one of them at least is in their ward. Same with the stake president. but someone will come to them, it's the friend, it's the somebody they know, it's a family member. No, they're not the stake, but we love this bishop, but he can't, but he can say, there's a chaplain in our ward and they would be able to do that. Would you like to meet them and see if that would work out? So he's, he has someone he can refer to because he may not know anyone else. They may not want to go to anyone else or the other persons, but whatever the parameters are about why they're making a decision to go with who they're going with, right? But that would be a help, I would believe. to a bishop. Same with a memorial service. Perhaps there's someone in the ward. Nobody really knows. He's going to be out of town. It's going to be at the mortuary. I mean, whatever it may be, but he has a chaplain who's probably done this 20 times. So they could help with that. They could facilitate it. They could lead it. Death notifications. That doesn't happen very often, I would think, with the bishop, but it could. There could be a situation where he's got to go tell grandma who could go with him. Well, that would be the chaplain. You know, so they have a lot of experience. So here's the cool thing. Chaplains are now going into CEDAW, so the Church Directory of Leaders. Oh, cool. So they'll be able to know, oh, here they are.

Kurt Francom:

So you can look at any bishop or they could go into CEDAW and look them up.

Tami Harris:

No, they're not there yet. As we speak, and I don't know how long that's going to take to do, but it's been approved and it's happening. That was mentioned by an Area 70 in the UK. He said, you know what would be so helpful? He said, if I could have chaplains in CEDAW and I could look to see if there was an emergency, and I'm just thinking in my mind, the events that are coming before the second coming of our savior, right? Those unfolding things will take place. If somebody in area 70 or someone could look and go, here's where my chaplains are, they're close to the situation, the train derailment or the typhoon or you know, whatever it may be, perhaps they can help if they've not been affected themselves. So that was Elder Schwartz in the UK and that was a year ago and permissions along the way have come. And so they're being credited now. So it was a brilliant idea. Why haven't we thought of it before?

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. I remember as a Bishop, I was actually there, that was in this moment where I was with somebody who was extremely suicidal and I, I'm this 29 year old young Bishop. I'm like, I'm never, what do I do with somebody like that? And so, I knew I couldn't leave him alone. Right. So I remember I just this random therapist that I had talked to once and I called her up and I'm like, there's a situation. What do I do? And she says, take him to the emergency room. And I'm like, oh, you can do that. OK, I'll put him in my car and take him. How would I know? But if I had

on speed dial a chaplain who just in these tense situations or had just met with this person and here's the situation, like what, you know, what advice would you give for that type of thing? And of course, we have the legal line and those things. I want to make sure that all that's in line, but just for someone to reach out to and say, how do you handle these situations? Like, what should I know or understand that would be really valuable?

Tami Harris:

Yeah, I think they're just a great resource. I don't know that they're going to be called upon a lot at all, but just to know, oh, there's something about just knowing you've got an extra helper in case, right? I think that would be...

Kurt Francom:

So, going back to the female chaplains, are there any uniqueness, unique things about our Latter-day Saint female chaplains? So, can female chaplains facilitate weddings and things? Oh, wow. Yeah. That's cool.

Tami Harris:

Yeah. It's even in the handbook.

Kurt Francom:

Wow.

Tami Harris:

Well, actually, I don't know that it's in the handbook. It's in the guidebook, the chaplain guidebook, and that is being updated. There's some updates that it will be taking place in the handbook. I don't know that it says, I think it just says chaplains. And so, that in my mind means male and female, which isn't the case, but I don't know if someone reading it would recognize that that's the case, right? I know because this is my job.

Kurt Francom:

So even in like a LDS chapel, they can facilitate the wedding. Wow. Wow. And the funeral as well, they could. Funerals. If it's at the mortuary, not maybe in the chapel.

Tami Harris:

Yeah, because typically there's, there's someone that's presiding there for that. And so, I mean, I've, I've still seen it done. I saw that done recently where there was the stake president was presiding, but they had this family had asked someone, they weren't a chaplain actually. I don't know who they were, but they were asking someone else to lead and conduct the funeral and they did and worked out fine.

Kurt Francom:

So. Awesome. Of course, check your handbooks and let's not get Tami in trouble. She worked for the church, but anyways, due diligence There.

Tami Harris:

I conducted a memorial. Well, actually it was a funeral and it was outside. one point perhaps in their youth with modern day saints, but they weren't and they didn't want anything other than this outside under a canopy, simple funeral with a few words said and a few scriptures and some music. And the chaplain who would typically do that was gone and called and said, can you please cover that for me? And I did and it was fine and it was simple. I can't see that taking place in a Latter-day Saint building. Again, I don't know what the situation was because there would be then a bishop.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. Sort of becomes an official church meeting, right?

Tami Harris:

Yeah. But then I've seen it from there at the graveside service, they may conduct that. Like, let's see, it's a family member and they may conduct that and then they would turn it over to whoever for the dedication of the grave. Yeah.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. Fascinating stuff. Any other point in principle, concept that you want to make sure I don't skip over or do a good job?

Tami Harris:

Yeah. Yeah. We just didn't get to tell enough stories.

Kurt Francom:

Well, did you have any good stories?

Tami Harris:

But Elder Hugh B. Brown once said, no matter what your past has been, I have a spotless future. And I used to use that with youth all the time.

Kurt Francom:

And I think it's so- No matter what your past has been- You have a spotless future. A spotless future, I love that.

Tami Harris:

And so every single Sunday when I would preach, I preached every single Sunday for over 30 years, but at least one interfaith worship service and sometimes two to these youth who didn't have to come, but they did. It's just marvelous to see them. And at the end of every service, I would say it to them, but I would have them repeat it in first person. So I would have them repeat at the end of every service, no matter what my past has been.

Kurt Francom:

Powerful.

Tami Harris:

Powerful. Yeah.

Kurt Francom:

That's beautiful.

Tami Harris:

And I think if we can all remember that wherever we are on the covenant path, tiptoeing off of it, tiptoeing back on wherever it may be, then we will be guided back because the future is spotless. And not everybody can be a chaplain, but everybody can be a disciple of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Kurt Francom:

Powerful. Any other stories?

Tami Harris:

I have lots of them. Do you want to hear a prison one? It's a really good one. Yeah, let's do it.

Kurt Francom:

I love a good prison story.

Tami Harris:

So when my dad died, his brother was serving in the temple, Jordan River Temple. And my dad's brother, my uncle looked just like my dad. And this man comes up to him and says, Are you Crozier? My dad's name is Crozier. And he goes, No, I'm his brother. And he goes, Oh,

yeah, you look just like him. Where did you know Crozier? And it's on my uncle's mind, right? That I just buried my brother. He was only 57 and he's gone. And, you know, and he said, Oh, I knew him out at the prison. And he said, Oh, did you work with them? And he said, no, I was an inmate. No, they're both bail workers in the temple. Right. So my uncle tells me this, he got his information. He goes, I know you're writing a story about your dad. Like you've got to talk to this guy. So, I call him and I go and meet with him and he goes, if you would have been younger, you would have known me. I was pretty famous, you know, kind of like, you know, I was, I was a renegade and I was known as the silk stocking bandit. And I'd put a silk stocking over my head and I would go in and I'd do robberies, gas stations in different places. And I was caught and I was thrown in prison and I thought, oh, I'm going to escape. And so he goes, I had to escape attempts. And he goes, they didn't work. And I was so upset. And I thought, OK, I just need to pray. I haven't prayed about escaping. That's what I need to do. I need the Lord's guidance on how to. And he goes, so I prayed and it worked. And I'm like, what? I didn't say that because I've got the poker face, right? I'm a chaplain. So I'm like, oh, tell me more. And he says, um, yeah, but it wasn't at all how I expected, like I wanted to be free. And I was chased for three days by the prison dogs. I was always just barely ahead of them. I was drinking water out of ditches. I didn't have any food. I didn't sleep. It was hell. And I was quite upset because yeah, I got out, but this was not how I pictured it. He goes, so I'm thrown back in prison. And then I think he said cell a or block a, which back then was solitary confinement, which I don't think they can do that now. And he said, and I get one meal a day and I'm there for a while. And then after a certain amount of time, I was blocked B and I got two meals a day and I could have one visit. And that was from the chaplain. And he goes, so your dad comes to see me. And we talk and he comes to see me frequently, and he invites me to come to church when I'm out. And I'm like, I have no interest in church because he's still really not a God. Because this escape did not go as planned. But he said, you know, I was so lonely and so bored that when I got out, I thought, yeah, I'm gonna go to church. He goes, so I did. And he goes, I liked it. And I felt at home. And he said, your dad asked me to be the Sunday school secretary, but I couldn't read. And I couldn't write because that was part of my getting into trouble all along the way is I was illiterate and I didn't do well in school. I quit. I got out. Right. He goes, but I realized like to keep the role, like I knew that was where Bob sat and I just would pass it around and I'd have Bob write his name and then I would like practice like the sound, like Bob or Andy or you know, whatever it would be. And he taught himself to read by doing that. And then he said, I joined in everything. My dad taught like how to win friends and influence people in prison and there was a softball team and there were the dedication of the chapel by the wayside by President Brown was during that time, he was there and he just got involved in every good thing. And it was time for him to be released and he's released. But before then, he was still smoking, which you could do back then. But in the prisons, you can smoke. So he said, so someone says to me, you're a hypocrite. And that really made him mad. And he thought, I am not. But he threw his cigarettes down and threw his lighter down. He goes, I never smoked again, because I realized he was right. I could hardly wait to get to church. And then I could hardly wait to get out to get my smokes. So I was, I was a hypocrite. Well, he's freed. And, uh, my dad had let the Eminem gleaners know that the YSA of back that in that time that he was coming and so that they could make plans and invite him and welcome him and enjoy his company. Cause he was, he had changed. He was different, right? His past was behind him and he had a spotless future. He got

a job with the school district as a custodian, did well, married, had to wait till Easter with probation and all of that, and was sealed in the temple. And sons went on missions, and he was an Elders Quorum president. at the time that my uncle met him, he was a bell worker. Wow.

Kurt Francom:

So, right? Who's writing the book about chaplain stories? Does that book exist?

Tami Harris:

No, but it needs to because I have so many stories like this and I think about it all the time. And I've asked, I've been asked several times, like, you've got to write a book of these stories. It just, I still have that moment yet, but I do keep a journal. So. Awesome. So this young man said to me, he was old by this time, he said, I found out that my prayer was answered. I was free from the addiction of tobacco. Yeah. And I was free from the walls that kept me in. And I was free from my sins. It just looked different. My escape looked different. But if I hadn't escaped, I wouldn't have been able to make those changes because that confinement that was so horrible allowed me to then change my life for the better.

Kurt Francom:

So good. So good, Tami. This is awesome. Any other point principle story that we missed?

Tami Harris:

I don't think so. I think we're good.

Kurt Francom:

Awesome. Good. Well, I've had church employees on the podcast as of late and it's, I always love helping the world get to know you people because as I've had opportunity to walk around the church office building, I'm just always so impressed by the individuals who are behind the scenes doing the work and wanting to make a difference and they just feel part of the greater church in their their efforts. It's just it's really inspiring to see you and your fellow colleagues work so hard. So keep up the good work. We're praying for you out here. And last question I have for you is, as you reflect on your time as a leader as a chaplain, how has being a leader helped you become a better follower of Jesus Christ?

Tami Harris:

I think it's helped me to become humble and to surrender. You know, the Lord places us, Elder Maxwell talked about this, that he places us in human orbits. It's certainly the same God that placed the star millennia before it was needed to announce the birth of the babe in Bethlehem would certainly pay that much attention or more, this is very loosely quoted, to where he places us. And if we follow the Savior and notice where he places us and people that we need to minister to, and that can be there for us as well when we are needing a boost or whatever it may

be. That is humbling and it's beautiful. And as we acknowledge the Savior in everything that we do, I just think that that helps us in everything. I can't imagine my life without the Savior, Jesus Christ. I owe Him everything. I'm so grateful for Him in my life.

Kurt Francom:

Now that we've reached the end of the episode, I quickly want to thank you for supporting the Leading Saints podcast. There's so much content out there to consider and you picked this one. If Leading Saints has made an impact in your life, we would sure like to hear about it at leadingsaints.org contact. And if you could quickly text or email this episode to a leader you know, I bet it will bless their life. You can mark off your good turn daily, and let's even call it ministering. Okay, maybe not that far. But seriously, thank you, and help us share this content. Remember, the Jody Moore presentation about youth and mental health is waiting for you at leadingsaints.org slash 14.

SPEAKER_00:

It came as a result of the position of leadership which was imposed upon us by the God of heaven who brought forth a restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. When the declaration was made concerning the only true and living church upon the face of the earth, we were immediately put in a position of loneliness. A loneliness of leadership from which we cannot shrink nor run away and to which we must face up with boldness and courage and ability.