



ANN KANSFIELD M.Div.

*Any transition serious enough to alter your definition of self will require not just small adjustments in your way of living and thinking but a full-on metamorphosis.*

- Martha Beck

For so many people, 9/11 was a life-altering experience. Ann Kansfield is one of those people.

On the morning of September 11, she was at home preparing for an interview that afternoon at the World Trade Center. After graduating from Columbia, she had worked as a broker in the financial industry, a role she enjoyed but found somewhat empty. The interview was an opportunity to continue on what Ann refers to as “the hamster wheel.” While grateful to have been spared on 9/11, Ann admits she entered “an empty time of feeling un-useful” as along with the twin towers, all of her immediate prospects for work had been destroyed as well. Never one to tolerate being “un-useful,” Ann reached out to a former professor and in the space of a phone call found herself rocketed onto the path for a Master of Divinity from New Brunswick Theological Seminary.

On 9/11, another life was also changed. Father Mychal Judge, a much beloved chaplain of the Fire Department of New York, was the first official victim of 9/11. He left a hole in many FDNY hearts and brought national attention to the importance of the role of chaplains in police and fire services, in the FDNY and elsewhere. One of the people made aware of the role of FDNY chaplain and moved by the impact of his work was Ann Kansfield.

Today, Ann is the pastor of Greenpoint Reformed Church in Brooklyn, New York and, for the past five years, she has also been fulfilling a dream that was seeded in Father Mychal’s death. Ann is the first female and first openly gay chaplain in the FDNY. She readily shares that “Father Mychal is my mentor in this work, even from beyond the grave. He had an incredibly joyful faith and a deep capacity to love people. That is what I want to bring to the FDNY in my work. The stories of his work are also helpful to me in filtering out what is unimportant and helping me to focus on what is most important in this ministry.”

To both of her roles, as pastor and as FDNY chaplain, Ann brings the same cheerful spirit, openness, energy and determination that characterized Father Mychal. It is a gift that has brought transformation to Greenpoint Reformed Church and is paving the way for her success at the FDNY. It is a gift that led to Ann being voted by the people of New York City in 2015 to be the first New York Times New Yorker of the Year.



When Ann arrived at Greenpoint Reformed Church in 2003, the congregation had long been in decline. Today, in the face of a changing Greenpoint and the realities of millennials moving away from formal places of worship, Greenpoint Reformed Church has reversed the trend and sometimes struggles to find space for the congregation in attendance each Sunday. Believing that the church should have a focus on social justice, she started a food pantry program. Beyond the willingness to innovate and start a food pantry program, when the program began to struggle a few years ago, she had the courage to stop it. Then, working with both church members and others with expertise in running food pantries, she re-shaped the program and brought in the expertise needed to make it thrive. Today, that program is very successful and serves about 150 people in the Greenpoint community weekly.

“I like finding ways that I, as an individual, can be of service to others. In turn, at Greenpoint, we look for ways to be of service to others in our community. If we can bring those who want to help others together with those in need of help, and I can facilitate this connection, then I am being successful and so is Greenpoint... and everyone experiences the tangible feeling of being part of making the community a better place.”

This desire to be of service has always been part of Ann. Family lore has it that at four, Ann rode her Big Wheel around the neighborhood and, without her parents' permission, invited everyone to Easter worship followed by dinner at her parent's home. Her parents found out about this on Saturday evening. (Rumor has it that all turned out ok!)

This passion for service was also evident when she learned of the role of chaplain in the FDNY.

Inspired by what she learned of Father Mychal and by the fact her grandfather had been a firefighter, she turned the full force of her energies towards finding out how to become their chaplain. She researched the role and “hounded” her city council member about opportunities. As fate would have it, the FDNY was interested in expanding its diversity, including in chaplaincy. Learning of the opportunity from a colleague in the Young Clergywoman's Project, she reached out and through friends was put in touch with the folks at FDNY. The rest, as they say, is history.

in her role as FDNY chaplain, she is very clear that her focus is always on the needs and concerns of the firefighters and EMTs of FDNY. When the chaplain is called out, on the third alarm of a fire, her role is to make sure that the firefighters are in the best shape possible to get their very challenging job done. Arriving on scene, she has to assess where is the greatest need and be present for all FDNY firefighters and EMTs on the scene. “These are the people that God sends to answer people's most significant prayer. After all, the most significant prayer someone may make in their life may be a 911 call.” In difficult circumstances, she



watches for firefighters who might be experiencing spiritual injury as a result of what is occurring, and to help them find restorative strength. As Ann says, “I am constantly finding ways to talk about prayer as a performance enhancing gift!”

Often times, however, the needs and concerns of firefighters and EMTs, are for the people impacted by fires. In those times, as Chaplain, Ann also tends the needs of those for whom the firefighters and EMTs have concern. (For a wonderful story about this, click on the following link: <https://blog.reformedjournal.com/2019/11/25/loaves-and-fishes-in-the-bronx/>)

Chaplains in the FDNY also provide support to injured firefighters as well as their families and the families of deceased firefighters. They support to retired firefighters, including 9/11 survivors who are now suffering from various cancers and other illnesses. Ann readily admits this is one of the more difficult aspects of the job.

When asked about whether she is bringing the spirit of innovation from Greenpoint to the FDNY, Ann makes it clear that the art of innovation is in knowing when and what to innovate and, on the other hand, what not to touch. “The FDNY has 150 years of successful tradition that I respect. For me, as a chaplain, innovation lies in small improvements that benefit individuals as well as the FDNY.” Examples she cites includes encouraging firefighters to take promotional exams, encouraging firefighters to think about things in different ways that may ease the toll of the work they do and, most recently, to working with them around the concept of moral injury. A recent article in USA Today that she co-authored with Rita Nakashima Brock, Senior Vice President and Director of the Shay Moral Injury Center at Volunteers of America, speaks eloquently to the pain and traumatic impact of the work of firefighters as well as those who go to war.

Beyond work on the front lines, one of the roles of the chaplain is to open and close ceremonies. “With every ceremony opening and closing, it is a chance to frame the event in spiritual terms.” She also sometimes frames the events in human terms. As one article reported, “At the annual Fire Department Medal Day ceremony in 2017, the audience was thrown a curveball when, during her invocation, FDNY Chaplain Ann Kansfield asked the first-responders present to raise their hands if at any point in their careers, their actions had saved someone’s life. There was an awkward hesitation at such a public display during the prayer element of the program. But the Reverend pressed. ‘Guys, I know people are alive because of you. Raise them higher. We need to see those hands.’ Dozens of white-gloved hands were extended in the air, along with those hands of relatives who had retired from the FDNY but were on hand to support a family member slated to be honored. ‘Look around and think of all the



future generations of people who will become parents and grandparents because of what you did,' Rev. Kansfield said."

For Ann Kansfield, all innovation is about helping people. "I really love life and God's people, and all are God's people ... as they are. I enjoy celebrating in gratitude all of life's quirks, as in life's quirks is all the color of life." Sometimes the face of innovation in a very established organization is simply to point out what often gets forgotten. And, if quirks or innovation is what it takes to get something done for God's people, be assured that, just as Father Mychal Judge did, Ann Kansfield will get it done.