

Ann Kansfield, Reformed pastor, becomes FDNY's first female chaplain

by [Harry Bruinius](#) in the [April 15, 2015](#) issue

*(The Christian Science Monitor)* Ann Kansfield was sworn in as the first female chaplain of the New York Fire Department in early March.

Kansfield is copastor of Greenpoint Reformed Church in Brooklyn along with her wife, Jennifer Aull. Her father, Norman Kansfield, also a minister in the Reformed Church of America, shed a few tears as his daughter donned the famous white bell cap and gold-buttoned, double-breasted uniform, becoming a part of the nation's largest and most historic fire department.

Her paternal grandfather, the only grandparent she knew, was a fire chief in a Chicago suburb.

"The fire department was really part of my family's culture and who he was, and so it feels like I'm continuing a family legacy," she said.

She is now one of eight FDNY chaplains, which include three Protestant ministers, four Catholic priests, and one Jewish rabbi.

Kansfield left a job with TD Waterhouse in the World Trade Center months before the 9/11 attacks to become an independent financial adviser, but she was considering another job in the south tower that September. After the attacks, when Wall Street shut down for days, Kansfield began to rethink her career.

"If I had died that day, all that really would have been said about me was, 'Well, she made some money,'" she said. "And that wasn't what I wanted to be known for."

She had already felt a calling to the ministry. She was the leader of the youth group at her church, but she thought her sexuality was too great a barrier to the ministry at the time.

"In the ensuing days," she said, "I realized that all I wanted to do was hang around my church."

She dreamed of serving the fire department as a minister, inspired by the story of Father Mychal Judge, an FDNY chaplain, who was open with some about being gay. He was the first certified fatality on 9/11.

“Many people in New York knew him for what he did before that,” Kansfield said. “He was such a tremendous role model in my life.”

Kansfield graduated from New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Jersey, where her father was president.