I imagine Jim Garfield is a man with lots of keys on his key chain.

After all, he’s a pastor at Assembly of God Church in Aurora. He’s a substitute teacher. He’s an umpire, and he’s a great public address announcer. Oh, and he’s a big Husker fan as well.

But he’s more than all that. He’s an optimist, an encourager. Basically, he’s a fun person to be around with a lot of positive energy to hand out at the asking.

He also just finished his second full season as the Hastings College football team chaplain, a role he takes very seriously.

"I had been a police chaplain for a long time and I was a hospital chaplain for quite a while," Jim told me. "I love sports, spent some time on the sidelines with Derek and Darin (sons who are head football coaches at Wood River and Central City, respectively). I wanted to be a sports chaplain and I knew it had to be within driving distance."

Having had a daughter graduate from Hastings a couple years ago, Jim said he was somewhat familiar with the college.

"I called Coach (Tony) Harper, but they had already been talking about adding a team chaplain," he said. "I happened to knock on the door when they were looking."

They were looking because Coach Harper thought something was missing within his program.

"As luck would have it, Pastor Jim reached out to us and we felt as a staff that this was just another step in the right direction for the Bronco football program," the coach noted. "Jim approaches every day with a positive outlook and energy that not only every coach should have, but every parent as well."

A couple interviews later, it was a done deal with Jim making the commute to each and every practice, games, meetings and more.

"Basically, I figured I had to earn the right to be heard," he pointed out. "I told the team I want to pay the price, I want to put in the time to hit the horseshoe (Hastings' good luck piece). I want to be there for the spiritual side of things."

He said he's dealt with players having deaths in the family, some injuries that require operations and of course, lots of prayers.

"Coach really trusts me with the kids. He is very wise in that he understands that God is the gut of the whole man. It goes faith first, family second, academics third and fourth should be football. Then if you flip that around, you have the foundation of faith building on everything."

Jim is the first-ever Hastings College football team chaplain, learning as he goes.

"I've learned it's their (the player's) space. It's their locker room. It's their bus, so I've had to adapt. I've also learned how much I don't know about football. I thought I knew football, but I know nothing. But just being around the players, I love it."

According to Coach Harper, one of the more unique moments happened during a home game a couple years ago when one of his players got injured.

"Pastor Jim is usually with our recruits that we have on campus," coach pointed out. "Well, Pastor Jim cares so much about our players that he went out on the field with the recruits to check on the injured player. So I get a warning from the officials that I have to keep my coaches and recruits off the field and under control.

"So now I am fired up because we are playing a Top 20 team and have the lead toward the end of the game and I did not want any penalties. I finally found out that it was Pastor Jim and go to confront him. He had a big smile on his face, put his arms around me, apologized, gave me the prognosis of the injured player and then went right back to talking with the recruits.

"Right then and there I just started smiling. I could not be upset because he cared so much about the player and potential players, that he was willing to do whatever he could for them."

Jim also pointed out that his family went through a tough time a while back when a granddaughter was stillborn. When he rejoined the team, Jim said he received lots of hugs from the players. Their concern was genuine.

"When I came back we lost the game but the players said that game was for me. They cared about me, about my family.

"It’s another family. It’s really neat and the real deal. I get chills with the wisdom of coach to bring me onboard. It’ll make a big difference in the lives of some. I don’t know if it will help them win, but I like to think I’m helping them develop as people. You have to handle life."

Coach Harper added that Jim has become a huge asset to the Bronco program.

"He is always available to our players, coaches and support staff at any time of the day. He is as valuable to this program as any coach."

So what’s next? Maybe another year, or a few more years, with Hastings? Or possibly

something bigger?

"Someday it would be fun to go to a major league team," he added. "You never say never. Sometimes the doors blow wide open."

And sometimes all it takes is the right key.