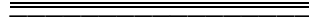


**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**



Faith-Based Organizations and Law Enforcement



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ABSTRACT

Law enforcement organizations have an obligation to provide the best type of service to their customers. This task is accomplished by criminal investigations/apprehension and crime prevention awareness. Simply because there are far more citizens than police officers in any jurisdiction, law enforcement organizations must pay particular attention to its community partnerships. Faith-based organizations are a critical component of any community. Faith-based organizations offer religious and spiritual leadership of the citizens within the communities.

Since communities are saturated with faith-based organizations consisting of church groups and outreach programs, and the membership of these organizations often trust the organizations more than police agencies, law enforcement organizations should maintain a partnership with faith-based organizations. Law enforcement agencies that institutionalize partnering with faith-based organizations have a unique advantage of not only providing the best customer service to their citizens, but also building strong partnerships and trust in the police and with the community. Strong partnerships encourage creative solutions to complex community problems, promotes social justice, safety advocacy, and reduces the overall recidivism for offenders recently released from prison.

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INTRODUCTION

Spirituality is extremely important to not only leaders, but also the entire community as a whole. Spirituality, or relying on a higher power, held, and still holds, a strong presence in the leaders of the 21st century. Every modern day president has acknowledged their strong relationship with the Christian faith and speaks of their faith when they give speeches. Most politicians make it a point to recognize spirituality while they are campaigning. Most governmental meetings and occasions open with prayer. This includes all meetings held in the national house and senate chambers, state house and senate chambers; additionally, many municipal proceedings first give acknowledgement to a higher power. Prayer is conducted in an attempt to obtain God's wisdom, His protection, and general oversight over the proceeding or event.

Faith-based organizations are the common denominator in providing spirituality. Faith-based organizations (FBO's) comes in many different shapes and sizes. Most of the general society in the United States are members of the Christian faith. This includes denominations such as Catholicism, Baptist, Methodist, and many others. Other FBO's include Islamic cults/sects, Buddhism, Judaism, and many others. As a result, FBO's are a driving force in the community.

As a result of the active role that FBO's play in the community, and the influence it has on almost every level of leadership in the United States, FBO's are a tremendous asset for any law enforcement organization. Thoren (2005) cited research from 1998, in the City of Hastings, Nebraska, where they partnered with a FBO in response to a growing problem of their youth not having any types of activities after school. As a result of lack of after school activities, students became victims of deviant behavior, including

fighting, smoking, loitering, and other type of crimes normally commented by youthful offenders. The community fell victim to these students.

It was not until the Hastings Police Department partnered with a FBO to solve this problem by creating an after school program (Thoren, 2005). This program was so successful that the FBO located state funding to maintain the program operations. In regards to the students, “the initial activities centered on crafts, and one of the first projects involved building birdhouses. When the birdhouses were complete the students took a field trip and placed them in the community. They received many positive comments from the community” (Thoren, 2005, para. 11). The community was pleased with the results and the students received positive feedback, which allowed the students to find additional projects to complete.

According to Einstein (n.d.), the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and expecting a different outcome. Law enforcement agencies respond to these types of situations on a daily basis and oftentimes to the same people over and over with a law enforcement objective (Fuller, 2009). Law enforcement’s primary objective is to investigate criminal offenses and apprehend criminal offenders. Law enforcement organizations should maintain a partnership with faith-based organizations. This results in creating creative solutions to complex community problems, promoting social justice, safety advocacy, and reducing the overall recidivism for offenders recently released from prison.

POSITION

Law enforcement organizations should maintain a strong partnership with FBO’s because strong partnerships grows trust between the community and the police.

Businesses come and go in a community. Leadership changes periodically in a community. Buildings get old and crumble down and new buildings are built in a community. However, long after businesses shut down or residents leave, the FBO will stand strong to offer the community continuity and places of worship.

FBO leaders have a unique expertise and compassion in dealing with the disadvantaged population and other citizens who are more likely to either become victims of criminal offense or criminal offenders. This would allow law enforcement agencies to collaborate with FBO's that already have programs and activities established, such as soup kitchens, GED programs, and after school activity programs. According to Gordon (2003), "In many troubled communities, the clergy is often viewed as the leader and voice of moral and secular authority. Residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods are often poorly represented in city councils and other policy-making bodies" (p. 7). As a result, the community is more likely to build and maintain relationships with its residents.

Law enforcement agencies should maintain a strong partnership with FBO's because strong partnerships encourages creative problem solving techniques to complex issues. In the introduction, the Hastings Police Department utilized a church organization to counter its problem with students having nothing to do after school. The Boston police utilized its FBO to counter the problem of the number of murders that were occurring in the early 1990's (Gordon, 2003).

According Braga (2001), the city of Boston was experiencing a significantly high number for violent offenses, particularly murder. These offenses were caused by the infestation of crack cocaine and the fight for control of the market by organized crime

and street gangs. At its highest point, the city of Boston had 150 murders in 1990. One of the significant crime acts occurred when a murder and/or attempt occurred at the funeral services of another person who had already been murdered.

The community leaders were outraged. The community blamed the Boston Police Department for their actions, or the lack thereof, towards the problem of so many people, particularly young African American males losing their lives every day. The police department equally blamed FBO leaders for not doing enough within their areas of influence to countering the on-going problem of violence in the city (Gordon, 2003).

It was evident that the Boston police did not have any type of relationship with its FBO leadership. The law enforcement objective at this time was to investigate criminal offense and to apprehend the offenders. However, in this scenario, the number of offenders outnumbered the police, and the criminal offenses were occurring faster than the police department could properly investigate. The Boston Police Department, along with FBO leaders, had to come together to work on a creative solution to this problem.

According to Braga (2001), "What evolved over the next few years was an unprecedented level of cooperation between the police, the clergy and the greater community that would permanently change how Boston responded to crime" (p.3). The two organizations put their heads together and began two initiatives: Operation Cease Fire and Operation Homefront. Operation Cease Fire's objective was to get the guns off of the streets and build the trust with the gang-members and other at-risk individuals. Operation Homefront's objective was to have the police and FBO leaders go door to door in the community to reestablish confidence in the community and to meet with the

families of at-risk individuals. As a result of this joint operation with the police and FBOs, the murder rate in the city of Boston went from 152 in 1990 to 14 in 1999.

The city of Chicago is currently going through a similar problem with the egregious number of gang related shootings amongst its juveniles, particularly with minority adolescents and young adults. According to Kingsbury (2010), a single weekend yielded over 54 shootings on the city's Southside, including the death of a 20 month old infant baby. A few months later, another weekend yielded 52 shootings. The police and gang members are at war and the solution thus far is arming the police heavier as the offenders become more and more brazen. These problems continue to occur in other cities such as Las Vegas, Indianapolis, and Los Angeles. The Boston project could yield favorable results in other areas experiencing similar problems.

Law enforcement agencies, particularly the prison system, should maintain a strong partnership with FBO's because of the enormous impact and transformations of the lives of prisoners who are currently incarcerated, those who have been recently released from prison, and former prisoners who have gone on to live productive lives. For the prisoners who are currently incarcerated, a lot of churches and groups have adopted the Angel Tree program. According to prison ministry fellowship, the Angel Tree is a program that connects inmates with their children during the holiday season. The Angel Tree program partners with the prison system to obtain and vet the inmates who would like to send their children a gift for the holidays. The Angel Tree program documents the approximate age and gender of the child. This information is then collected and released to local churches who want to participate. The church membership is then give this information to purchase a gift for the child. The gifts are

collected and centralized where the gifts can be given to the child with the inmates (parents) names attached (Prison Fellow, n.d.).

Recently-released prisoners have a high probability of going back to prison. Some prisoners are released to halfway houses for a period of time. Other prisoners are paroled with very stringent conditions, often including periodically meeting with a parole officer, finding a job, and random drug testing. Lancaster County in Pennsylvania estimated that there are 600,000 prisoners released from American prisons each year. Approximately 6,000 are released back into Lancaster County and 64% of prisoners who have been released will commit offenses again within two years of their release date.

In an effort to reintegrate prisoners into society, Lancaster County partnered with an organization called the Potter's House (n.d.). According to the Potter's House (n.d.), the Potter's House is a FBO that transitions needs of pre-release and post release prisoners to a residential living facility with a vision to "envisions households where 3-5 single adults will reside together, for a transition period, in a family oriented, Christ-centered environment establishing principles to sustain a lifestyle free from addictions and support a wholesome life with guidance by the Holy Spirit" (para. 3).

A resident of this house was named Barry (Potter's House, n.d.). Barry struggled with drug addiction and was in and out of jail from 2007 to 2011. During his last incarceration, he realized that if he wanted to maintain a relation with his family, specifically his children, he would have to make some changes when he was released. Barry applied and was accepted to the rehabilitation program. As a result of this program, Barry accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and personal Savior, reconnected

with his family, stayed away from his former friends and other negative influences, and found a job (Potter's House, n.d.).

COUNTER POSITION

Law enforcement organizations that maintain strong partnerships with FBO's have opposition. Political correctness is a strong driving factor as it pertains to law enforcement organizations partnering with FBO's. According to Johnson (2011), maintaining a clear distinction between church and state is very important. Some Americans believe that when law enforcement agencies partner with FBO, this is a clear violation between the separation of church and state. This type of person would argue that the police agencies that partner with FBO's in the form of conducting outreach programs, initiatives, and other projects and the Boston Miracles is not actually effective. According Johnson (2011), "in an age of political correctness, one of the last acceptable prejudices is one regularly leveled against the involvement of highly religious people and their faith-based approaches to social problems" (para. 8).

A refutation to the opposition rests with the overall success of the partnership. Johnson (2011) further indicated that people who were at risk to come into the criminal justice, and those who have been in prison, parole, and/or probation have a strong reliance on their faith. These people often speak of the religion to others and how FBO's have helped them more than hurt them. Those who argue for the separation from church and state primarily have a problem with overall religion.

Another opposition to law enforcement agencies maintaining strong partnerships with FBO's is that some non-Christian organizations are discriminated against. Non-Christian organizations are often very defensive when FBO's, particularly Christian

organizations, have events that involve not only law enforcement organizations, but also city governmental entities. According to an article by Clark (2014), the Chief of Police in Birmingham, Alabama recently conducted a prayer walk in the city street. Chief Roper, who is also an ordained minister, “is involved with the initiative Prayer Force United, a coalition between the chief, area churches and local residents to host monthly prayer walks and faith-based gatherings in areas of Birmingham that are most affected by crime” (Clark, 2014, para. 3).

The Freedom from Religion Foundation, a prominent Atheist group, opposed the prayer walk. The Freedom from Religion Foundation (FFRF) indicated that it is inappropriate for the chief of police to utilize police cruisers to lead the walk (or parade) (Seidel, 2014). The FFRF says that during the walk, the chief of police gave a speech to all of the participants. The chief proclaimed that the city of Birmingham was covered by God and he openly acknowledged his servitude to Jesus. Chief Roper believes that he is a servant leader that walks under the direction of God’s order. Chief Roper’s first responsibility is doing the work of God as it is outlined by his daily devotion and his daily prayer time. Chief Roper operates under that notion that “at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow, of things in earth, and things under the earth and that every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2: 10-11, King James Version).

In refutation to this position, law enforcement executives never want to remain exclusive towards any organization. At the very minimum, if law enforcement agencies maintain partnerships with organizations that have demonstrated a dislike or distrust of them, law enforcement will learn more about them. True tolerance loves enemies, accepting their differences and remaining humble (unknown). In Clark’s (2014) article,

Chief Roper contended that he welcomes all organizations to partner with the Birmingham Police Department. Chief Roper remains inclusive to all religions, to include Atheists groups and any other non-Christian groups (Clark, 2014).

RECOMMENDATION

Faith in a high power is the driving force for any FBO. Faith already plays a major role in modern day society; the American culture is inundated with things that people do and say that has a religious connotation. For example, when someone sneezes, it is normally followed up with the response of "Bless You." At the dinner table, it is common to say a prayer before eating food. The United States "Pledge of Alliance ends with "one Nation under God."

Since the urban and even rural areas are saturated with FBO's consisting of church groups and outreach programs, and the membership of these organization often trusts the organizations more than police agencies, law enforcement organizations should maintain a partnership with FBO's. Law enforcement agencies that institutionalize the partnering with faith-based organizations have a unique advantage of not only providing the best customer service to their citizens, but also strong partnerships builds trust between the police and the community. Strong partnerships encourage creative solutions to complex community problems, and reduces the overall recidivism for offenders recently released from prison.

There are many other examples of how law enforcement's partnership with FBO's provides a positive impact to communities. According to Braga (2001) a neighborhood in Wichita, Kansas was suffering from drug abuse, violence, and overall

high crime. FBO's and law enforcement worked together with real estate investors to retake their neighborhoods with Project Safe Neighborhood.

Traditionally, law enforcement's primary objective is to investigate criminal offenses and apprehend criminal offenders. In 2014, there are still officers that have the "cuff and stuff" attitude. This means that this type of officer is not accepting of change, and typically these types of officers are veteran officers. This enforcement strategy was acceptable during the times where veteran officers were first hired on their departments.

It is the responsibility of law enforcement organizations and law enforcement executives to move their department out of the mindset of maximum enforcement to the operations of partnerships. As a result, law enforcement organizations should maintain a partnership with faith-based organizations. This results in creating creative solutions to complex community problems, safety advocacy, and reduces the overall recidivism for offenders recently released from prison.

According to Bosman and Blinder, in 2014, Michael Brown, an unarmed African American male was shot and killed by a Ferguson, Missouri police officer. Due to the questionable circumstances surrounding this shooting, the citizens, particularly adolescent and young African American males, protested this shooting, resulting in the several days of unrest, looting, property damage, and multiple arrests from the police. The local law enforcement agencies that assisted the Ferguson Police Department relied on the faith-based community along with community leaders to encourage these youths not to be violent. Some of the methods were very successful. As a result, the protestors complied with the mandated curfews and did not cause further violence each

night. However, other youths continued to conduct lawless behavior. Although that there is no guarantee the community partnership will be effective, law enforcement agencies should maintain a strong relationships with faith- based organizations.

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