

**The Bill Blackwood  
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**Ministers Partnership with Patrol Stations**



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## **ABSTRACT**

In today's culture, law enforcement is constantly looking for innovative ways to bring the police and the community closer together. Ministers have a great amount of power from the pulpit and can heavily influence their congregations in the support of the local police. Local pastors can utilize their influence by working with the police to help calm a neighborhood that questions a controversial police action, such as a shooting. This quick action, either on the scene, or from the pulpit by ministers, can quickly calm a community and help build a true relationship of trust and accountability between the police and the community. Law enforcement agencies should create a partnership between the local police station and the area pastors to further strengthen the police-community relationship. Building this partnership helps support the relationship policing model and builds community trust. It also provides another avenue of assistance to not only citizens in the community, but also to police officers on the scenes.

Research has shown that although the police-minister partnership is a fairly new concept, it has had great results in the cities it has been utilized in. Specific guidelines need to be set by each individual department on how pastors, officers, and citizens would interact at the scenes, but having all three together on scenes will only strengthen the community-police relationships that every department is striving for.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction .....	1
Position .....	2
Counter Arguments .....	7
Recommendation .....	12
References .....	15

## INTRODUCTION

Law enforcement agencies are constantly looking for ways to work with the community to become more effective and efficient. Community policing philosophy places an emphasis on the police-community relationship to work together to solve problems in the neighborhood. It was designed for the police officer to get out of the police car and interact with the public to solve the needs of the community. As is to be expected, changes in society have led to changes in policing. The community oriented policing concept has been limited because many police departments across the nation are struggling with inadequate staffing and resources. Due to citizens' distrust of police and a general disconnect between the police and the community, new efforts are being considered in order to bridge the strained relationship.

A new policing philosophy, relationship policing, is starting to become the "buzzword" around departments nationwide. Chief Myers of Newport News Virginia says somewhere along the way of training officers, agencies forgot about the reality that "all policing is done through relationships" (Myers, n.d., para. 1). He goes on to state that relationships must be face to face (Myers, n.d.). In a world where text, tweets, and other social media seem to have taken over all communication, it is easy to see how this face to face communication is lost. Police departments must now find a way to strengthen this face to face communication. Relationship based policing seeks to have the community involved not only in conversations, but also in development of best practices and training (Beck, 2016). This is a new concept for many police departments in allowing the community to have any type of input on training and police related issues.

There are many ways in which a police department can change to a relationship policing model, but one of the most important ways is through the development of a ministers-police partnership. Every week, churches across the United States provide services for their congregations. According to an article by Green, 51% of Americans surveyed say they attend church at least once a month (Green, 2016). Even though this number only constitutes half of America, it still offers a huge percentage of the population who sit under the influence of their church leaders. As police organizations are striving to build relationships and positively impact the largest portion of community members, it is imperative to attract as many large organizations as possible to achieve the greatest support from the community. It is because of this that Law Enforcement Agencies should create a partnership between the local police stations and the area pastors to further strengthen the police-community relationship.

## **POSITION**

Relationship policing creates a bond of trust that can be called upon and used during times of unrest. Building a relationship between groups such as the Occupy Movement and LAPD allowed the police department to share expectations and procedures with each other, thus hoping to avoid any civil unrest during times of controversy (Beck, 2016). As in a family relationship, if one truly knows and trust the person being dealt with, then communication and dialogue is straightforward and effortless. Relationship policing establishes communication, discussions, and trust among many groups within the community.

Based on the study above that indicates over 51% of the community attends church monthly, it is logical to first build this partnership the church where we can

influence the greatest volume of people. During recent hurricanes in Texas and Florida, the impact that local churches had on helping the community were evident. Many churches set up distribution centers to assist in getting food and necessary supplies to their community, housed volunteers, became shelters for those who were displaced, and launched restorations efforts. Churches are the cornerstone of communities and seek to provide assistance to the public.

Due to the recent events in American involving police and citizens, there needs to be a go-between or connection among the police and the citizens. The pastors can provide this go-between once they are engaged in personal relationships with their local law enforcement personnel. They are in a position of influence over their congregations and have the ability to positively persuade attitudes of cooperation between police and citizens.

The idea of a ministers-police partnership is not new. The Arlington Clergy and Police Partnership (ACAPP) was established in 2009. This group has been a bridge to change community perception of the police and have citizens and police working together in a whole new concept. Officer Fretwell, an Arlington, Texas police officer, says a goal is to share information, and through prayer and community involvement, have a safer community (“Arlington ACAPP Organization Brings Together,” 2016). Charles Richardson, who is the ACAPP president and director of security at a local church, said that many times neighbors will talk to ministers but not to police (“Arlington ACAPP Organization Brings Together,” 2016).

According to the National League of Cities, the faith community serves as a critical link between the police and the community and steps should be taken to

reinforce this connection. Pastors can show great support or criticism from the pulpit, social media, and the streets regarding police action. This relationship has to be built now though. Waiting until a controversial incident happens is too late to start the relationship process (Calhoun, 2017).

In 2016, the cities of Charlotte and Tulsa both experienced officer involved shootings. In Charlotte, the aftermath was chaotic and there was heavy criticism of the police. On the other hand, in Tulsa, Reverend Blakney, a pastor for one of the largest black churches in the area, made a positive comment about his trust in the Tulsa mayor. This small remark of faith in the process seemed to quell any potential uprisings by the community. A relationship had been built between the two parties long before, and the bond had been formed (Calhoun, 2017). Ultimately, both police and pastors desire a stronger and safer environment for all.

In many troubled communities, the clergy is viewed as the leaders and the voice of moral and secular authority. Clergy can rally congregations towards lasting solutions for crime and violence (Gordon, 2003). Because of the power that ministers have over the community, and as evident from the examples above, the importance of having a relationship between the police station and the local churches is confirmed. This initial relationship, once established, can have long-lasting effects on moving the department to a relationship policing model. This will ultimately reduce distrust of the police by the community. This positive connection between the pastors and the police will further improve community relations and trust of the police.

Due to the power that a pastor has on his congregation and the amount of people that a pastor can reach in any given week, it only makes sense to build a strong

relationship with the church leaders. This relationship with the church leaders will be passed on to congregation members and the bond between police and the community will continue to grow exponentially.

An additional benefit of having a ministers-police partnership is the resources that the ministers and the churches could provide to both the community and to the police officers themselves. A pastor with the Arlington ACAPP said they offer prayer and spiritual counseling to the community, but can also assist community members with food and supplies ("Arlington ACAPP Organization Brings Together," 2016). In Portland Oregon, ministers have assisted the police with sex trafficking issues. Because of the partnership the police department has developed with the ministers, many times potential arrest suspects are diverted to a group that can actually help the individuals instead of just processing them for arrest. In many cities, after school programs, tutoring, and other social programs have been opened by faith based groups like the ministers to assist the police in their mission. In certain areas crime has been shown to be reduced by 50% (Calhoun, 2017)

In order to keep a separation of church and state, police officers will perform the police function as required and refrain from religious involvement. A ministers group can provide resources to officers other than the standard options available to them. Gang members and other people with non-criminal behaviors can be funneled to programs established by the local churches and ministers. The police department can encourage kids and teenagers who are typically hanging out unsupervised to attend programs managed by local churches. This is beneficial for law enforcement officers as it reduces opportunities for the kids to get into trouble.

On the streets, pastors can provide death notifications and counseling for family violence calls. Calls of sexual assaults, kidnappings, and other traumatic events could certainly utilize assistance from pastors (Nottingham, 2009). Many times, in fires or other tragic events, the initial period provides a challenge of what a family is going to do. A pastor's church could provide immediate shelter and/or supplies until the family has had time to regroup. By having a local pastor in the community the police serve, there is a greater chance that the pastor and the victims may already know each other, thus making the assistance that much easier.

The close relationship the police build with the ministers also allows them to respond to issues that police officers may need individually. Officers frequently respond to traumatic calls and scenes with seemingly no one there to check on their welfare. If a pastor was on the scene of a traumatic event, not only could his focus be on the welfare of the victim but also on that of the police officer.

When an officer has completed the scene investigation, a pastor's attention should turn to the officer to debrief him on his/her emotional stress. If the officer has not had time to de-stress, often they carry this stress home. Dependencies such as drugs and alcohol and even family issues can manifest if the stress is not handled properly (Nottingham, 2009). Ministers can be used to check on injured officers at the hospital and even provide services for them and their families. Many times, other family members will need rides to the hospital if an officer is injured. Some police agencies may have the resources to pick up the family, but in smaller departments, where resources are scarce, this could be of great assistance.

Officers experience the same issues that community members encounter. Having a local pastor with whom the officers have built a rapport, can be deeply beneficial and can assist them with services and resources. The pastors' provisions and resources that they can provide to the community and to the officers individually is only limited by the relationship built between all parties involved.

## **COUNTER ARGUMENTS**

Opponents of a ministers-police partnership will be quick to argue that it is a violation of the church and state provision, specifically the Establishment Clause. The Establishment Clause prevents the government from making any law "respecting an establishment of religion." ("Establishment Clause," n.d.) The law continues in prevention by not allowing the government to establish an official religion or showing favoritism for religion over non-religion and vice versa ("Establishment Clause," n.d.). In establishing a ministers-police partnership, an argument could be made that if every possible religious view or denomination did not have a seat at the table, it could be construed as discriminating against whoever wasn't there. The Establishment Clause has caused a great deal of controversy recently in many forms of religion and government. Statues of religious figures and even a statue of the Bible has caused heated debates on the legality of being on government property.

Hart (2006) stated that government and religion should not coincide because the government's problems cannot be solved by Christianity (as cited in Standridge, 2009). Hart (2006) continued to argue that Christianity is focused on a realm that is not part of the current world so it is not going to solve today's problems. His final argument was that Christianity is so broad and contains various viewpoints that there is no way to use

it to solve problems without alienating one group or another (as cited in Standridge, 2009).

Calabresi states that, “We think that religious bodies ought to be free of governmental control and the government ought to be free of control by ecclesiastical authorities” (2008, p. 495). He goes on to explain that our religious leaders are not state leaders and that our state leaders are not religious leaders (Calabresi, 2008). Others will quote the Bible as a separation of church and state, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s” (Matt 22:21 New American Standard Version). One would think that from the documentation above there is a valid argument, legally, of why a ministers-police partnership would not be allowed in departments.

The first amendment did little to settle the issue of what role the government was to play in religion (Standridge, 2009). There have been several judgments on the constitutionality of religion, specifically prayer in government organizations. The Establishment Clause has been challenged several times. There is no dispute that the government cannot force individuals to go to or not go to church, or force individuals into a certain belief (Baker, 2013). According to *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, a “Lemon Test” was set up to make sense of the First Amendment regarding religious issues. The Lemon Test had three key factors (Baker, 2013). In order to be in compliance with the First Amendment, the group, organization, or issue must have a secular legislative purpose, it must not have a primary effect to advance or prohibit religion, and it does not foster an excessive government predicament with religion (Baker, 2013). This test has

been challenged multiple times, but based on the current makeup of the Supreme Court; it has not been used in the negative against the ministers-police partnership.

In 2013, the American Atheists and the Freedom from Religion Foundation both threatened to file suit against Operation Good Shepherd. This operation was a joint venture between local churches and the Montgomery, Alabama Police Department to prevent crime, and to comfort victims and families at crime scenes. The police department made it clear that the goal of the program is to lower crime and not spread Christianity (Reaves, 2015). If the true goal is to help lower crime, then this helps fulfill the government's responsibility to the people.

In looking at historical arguments involving separation of church and state, for now it appears that organizations that abide by a strict secular purpose will continue to operate. In Montgomery, for example, a program was assumed to have goals of crime prevention and grief counseling. It also requires that all volunteers are clergy members and asks for members from all denominations. Finally, it mandates for the volunteers to address the needs of the victim and not what the volunteer pastor thinks they need. The program seeks additional volunteers (ministers) to reduce and prevent crime and provide counseling to victims and officers. *Doe v. Beaumont Independent School District* (Reaves, 2015) showed that a significant secular purpose of clergy in schools was to provide a safe school environment and a dialogue between clergy and students over values and morality. In another case, *Maylon v. Pierce County*, the Washington Supreme Court ruled that a chaplaincy program established by the Pierce County Sheriff's Office did not violate the Constitution (Reaves, 2015). Going forward, both of the above cases have established case law which seem to support any additional

ministers-police partnerships, as long as the focus stays on secular goals. However, this could change in the future depending on the view and makeup of the Supreme Court Justices.

Another opposition in a ministers-police partnership is the assertion that it is difficult to determine if faith based organizations are effective. There is no method to formally evaluate whether the programs are providing a valuable service to the community. Churches have community outreach programs but it is impossible to examine their effectiveness on crime in a specific community.

According to the Dodson, Cabage, & Klenowski, "There is a general lack of empirical support the claim that faith-based programs are effective in addressing many social ills, including criminal behavior" (2011, p. 374). Ebaugh, in a 2003 presentation, said, "It is very difficult to be able to say faith-based organizations are more or less effective than secular organizations" (Fisher-Townsend, 2006, p. 70). If these types of organizations cannot show they are useful, then surely police departments would not want to waste resources or time in a partnership.

Baltimore Police Major Russell was tasked with building a group between residents, spiritual organizations, and former inmates. As the relationship progressed between the parties, there were 48 homicides in the Eastern District of Baltimore in 2007. As Major Russell took over this area and moved his program forward in 2008, homicides dropped to 38 and by 2011 were down to 28 (George, 2013). Associate Professor, Jim Nolan, of West Virginia University, said, "Partnerships with places of worship are an effective long-term strategy, especially in cities" (George, 2013 para. 11). Pastors began doing prayer walks, and the needs of the community were passed

on to the police through some of the pastors and congregation members of the churches. The effect has been a transformation of the entire community (George, 2013).

In another example, during the 1990's in Boston, a group of pastors teamed up with a unit of police officers and together they took back the streets of Boston. By the late 1990's Boston homicides had reached an all-time high. A team of black pastors gathered together and formed the Ten Point Coalition (Scott, 2007). This group focused on ten specific points to mobilize black churches to reduce youth violence in the community. The police had established the Youth Violence Strike Force in response to the homicides. The police and the minister group connected and began walking the streets at night talking to people. Operation Ceasefire was a campaign created by the police and prosecutors to identify gangs and warn the members that gang activity would no longer be tolerated (Scott, 2007). Those who complied were offered multiple social services to help them get out of the gang lifestyle. Those who didn't comply would face every legal sanction possible to rid the city of the gang lifestyle. As racial barriers were strained during this time and the concept of community policing was just beginning to ignite, the pastors proved to be a key player in the operation. They supported the police in their strategies and provided the "umbrella of legitimacy" to let others in the community know that this was a genuine effort to take back the community (Scott, 2007). Before long, the number of youth homicides in Boston in 1996 had dropped to 25 from 46 the previous year (Scott, 2007). In 1997, there were only 15 homicides and this number held in 1999 and 2000 (Scott, 2007). The two examples above show hard numbers of how the ministers-police partnership is effective. As the programs continue

to expand and more cities support this type of police partnerships, additional data will support the effectiveness of a ministers-police partnership.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

In order to improve the relationship between the community and the police, relationship policing, a new style of policing, is being implemented across the country. Relationship policing's foundation is dependent on building a true relationship between the community and the police. An excellent way to introduce this type of policing is to create a partnership between community churches and the local police station. Since a considerable number of citizens claim to attend church at least monthly, the pastors at the local churches provide the police with the greatest access to citizens. The pastors in the community are distinguished as leaders to follow and listen to in a time of crisis.

Ministers have a powerful voice from the pulpit and help to sway actions for or against the police due to their position in the church. A controversial situation involving the police and the community could be kept calm with the assistance of the local pastors. The local officers in the community can foster relationships with the local pastors, which will lead to a relationship with the congregations and the community members in that area. Once that relationship is established, a feeling of trust and support from both groups can continue to grow.

Not only can the ministers-police group support relationship policing and building trust and cooperation in the community, but the ministers group can also provide assistance and services to citizens and police. As officers and pastors deal with traumatic events, pastors can provide counseling and compassion to the victims as well as offer resources such as shelter, food, and other necessities. In many cities, after

school programs, and other social programs have been sponsored and operated by faith based groups. In certain areas, as a result of church involvement with police efforts, crime has been shown to be reduced by 50% (Calhoun, 2017). Specific policy guidelines would need to be setup by each individual agency on how pastors would respond and what specific action they could take on an active scene. This would need to be discussed and agreed upon as an official policy so officers as well as ministers would have clear guidelines on how and when they could assist on what specific types of scenes. Depending on the type of the scene involved, ministers could find themselves as witnesses that could require additional interviews of them and potential court testimony. All of this information would need to be in official documentation so that everyone knows the requirements of their actions on the scene as well as potential actions after the scene.

Opponents of a ministers-police partnership will cite it as a violation of the separation of church and state. This has already been deliberated over several court cases and the “Lemon Test” which supports the Constitution’s Establishment Clause has been created to ensure specific goals are followed (Baker 2013). Other opponents will state that there is no evidence to prove that faith-based programs are effective in reducing crime (Dodson, Cabage, & Klenowski, 2011). There are cases such as the partnership in Baltimore that proved the cooperation between police and pastors did in fact reduce crime (George, 2013).

Every law enforcement agency should have a ministers-police partnership. The legal battles have already been fought and the statistics show that it is an effective tool in reducing crime and in building a relationship of trust between the police and the

community. The resources that can be obtained between these groups has no limits and will only expand from the initial creation. The group must stay focused on the mission of reducing crime and building a community relationship. All faiths and denominations should be invited to participate, as the goal is not about doctrine or theology but about developing trust within the community and providing both community and departmental support. An effective ministers-police partnership will have long-lasting, positive benefits, the full realm of which are still yet to be seen.

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