



## **COMMUNITY POLICING IN THE AGE OF FERGUSON**

### **Introduction**

My name is Rev. Jeffrey Brown, and I am the President of Rebuilding Every City Around Peace (RECAP), a national initiative that mobilizes faith groups in cities across the United States to end the era of gang-violence and restore neighborhoods to peace. RECAP is a continuation of the collaborative violence reduction work created in Boston, MA, where law enforcement leaders worked closely with faith-based partners such as the Boston Ten Point Coalition. Using the lessons learned from the Boston model, RECAP helps faith-based communities:

- Build coalitions between entities such as police, courts, community organizations, and other faith-based organizations specifically around critical public safety concerns;
- Create cultures of trust, with the goal of sharing information and resources within these coalitions; and
- Use proven principles and methods to combat and eventually neutralize the current culture of violence with a culture of peace, and provide alternatives to promote healthy communities. It will also repair the relationships between inner-city communities and public safety stakeholders.

### **Context**

The results of today's culture of urban violence, puts an ever-increasing burden on both the human and economic resources of America's cities and towns. When adolescents become involved in youth gang life, they set in motion a "life cycle" of human tragedy and economic hardship to their communities. Every act of violence brings human costs to victims and their families, and dollar costs to the public sector -- in addition to the loss of youths' potential benefits to their families, community, and the overall economy that flows from time spent wastefully in prison, rather than productively in high school, college, and the workplace.

Each cycle of increased adolescent violence forces cities to use more of their limited resources to create an ever larger and more visible police presence in urban neighborhoods -- fueling a parent's fear that their child may be suspected of crimes they did not commit, or arrested for trivial offenses. This action continues to build mistrust between the community and law enforcement. Increased arrests and prosecutions mandate increases in funding for the criminal

justice system; increases school drop-out rates as youth are imprisoned; and saddles more families with the costs of legal defense. As the cycle continues, so do increases in the costs of incarceration and probation, social services, and educational and job placement services for former prisoners. As parolees find legitimate work options limited or nonexistent, many eventually return to gang life, and the cycle begins again.

Cities and municipalities continue to struggle with ways in which they can effectively address public safety issues. Many urban law enforcement agencies now admit that they cannot “arrest”, “prosecute” or “incarcerate” their cities out of their eras of violence. ***What is needed to break the cycle is a collaborative approach, with a strong, balanced community component that shares the lead in yielding measurable, tangible results in violence reduction.***

### **Why Churches Are Important in the Public Safety Equation**

The church is the most long-standing, positive and stable institution in any given community that has been plagued with violence. Families utilize the resources of the church for support and strength when trauma occurs, and for moral and spiritual guidance as they move forward from traumatic events. Church leaders understand the urban context and leaders can be found to represent the various ethnic cultures, helping to create bottom up solutions accepted by the community. This facilitates buy-in as the solutions and requested engagement in solving the problem is not coming from outside of the community. Churches generate a volunteer pool of individuals who will work for the cause long after media attention leaves, or when finances wane. Members will do the work because their motivation for success is tied to their belief structure. Also church collaborations add up to a reliable leadership block that will speak on behalf of the community. Because a leader's participation will be based on a “calling”, the larger community of color will listen and give due consideration. Finally among the roots to violence in a community (social, economic, educational, even judicial), there are also moral and spiritual roots to be addressed. Towards that end, churches are best positioned to address the ethical issues raised at the street level. The inclusion of churches is an essential element in any comprehensive law enforcement strategy. Because no community can survive without law enforcement, it is therefore important for churches to partner with police, probation and court agencies as they develop their community outreach strategies. What we have done is use violence as a catalyst to create a collation, which not only reduces violence but improves police community relations, changing the culture of a community, which has a lasting impact on public safety and health.

The key aspects of the faith-based model are:

- Partners with law enforcement, the courts and corrections
- Involves transformation at the community and individual level
- Creates community-based coalition and collaboration
- Addresses the moral and spiritual aspects of violence and community policing
- Includes both short-term crisis intervention and long term transformation

- Partners with families to help transform both individuals and communities

## Recommendations

My recommendations for good community policing to be revived in cities across the country are based on the recent activity in Boston since the infamous grand jury verdicts in Ferguson, MO and New York City. Every law enforcement agency in the country was on alert during this time, based on well-founded fears of rioting and mayhem that could erupt in reaction to the verdicts. Boston, despite its history of racial unrest, handled the situation in a very different way. In anticipation of the Ferguson verdict, Police Commissioner Evans held a number of emergency meetings with area black clergy gathering ideas and advice on how to move forward in case of protests. Strategy meetings were convened in the city coordinated by the Mayor's cabinet and elected officials. After the verdicts were rendered, area clergy held a number of forums city-wide in churches, giving residents a chance to freely express their thoughts and frustrations, to ask the uncomfortable questions around race and policing and present ideas in a constructive way. Law enforcement officials also attended to respond or be available to answer questions. When two police officers in New York City were tragically gunned down, prompting a wave of pro-police protests and responses in white sections of Boston, black clergy convened a prayer service bringing police brass and young protest leaders together to "reset the terms of engagement", and establish informal relationships between the groups to establish back-channel relationships. The result, Boston's response to the Michael Brown and Eric Garner verdicts was different than Ferguson, MO and New York City.

All this was possible, in part, because of Boston Police Department's long-standing community policing strategy, and its relationships with local faith groups. Some recommendations:

1. ***An effective community policing strategy should include strong faith-based or community-based partnerships.*** Boston Police has enjoyed a long-standing relationship with black clergy, in particular the Boston Ten Point Coalition, working together on gang violence issues. This in turn has extended an "umbrella of legitimacy" to the department. Because of the effort of both groups to develop a shared understanding of street life (eg. Small number of youth drive bulk of violent crime, many can benefit from prevention/intervention strategies, agreement that small number need to be taken off the streets), BPD was able to successfully build a platform of intervention, prevention education and suppression that acknowledges the faith group as a trusted partner.
2. ***Faith-Based and Community Partnerships deliver a needed "moral voice" that strengthens community policing efforts.*** The leaders in these institutions (clergy, sports coaches, Boys and Girls Club leaders, etc.) convey the collective sentiment that violence will not be tolerated, which helps blunt criticism towards law enforcement's approach to suppression.
3. ***Supporting faith-based and community based programming for high-risk youth builds***

**trust.** Many organizations are committed to providing avenues to connect disenfranchised youth to opportunities and services. When they are actively supported by law enforcement (by participation in activities, aiding in fund-raising, etc.), it strengthens the perception that the partnerships themselves are of value to the police.

## Appendix Research

- “Boston Officials Urge Peace Following Ferguson Decision”  
<http://www.whdh.com/story/27473540/boston-officials-urge-peace-respect-following-ferguson-decision>
- “Impassioned crowds take to the Streets in Boston”  
<http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2014/11/26/boston-ferguson-protestors-want-leaders-listen-not-speak/zfXLeKLIBEppDJipHThyqN/story.html>
- “BPD works hard to show that Boston is not Ferguson”  
[http://www.bostonherald.com/news\\_opinion/columnists/peter\\_gelzinis/2014/11/gelzinis\\_bpd\\_works\\_hard\\_to\\_show\\_that\\_boston\\_is\\_not](http://www.bostonherald.com/news_opinion/columnists/peter_gelzinis/2014/11/gelzinis_bpd_works_hard_to_show_that_boston_is_not)
- “BPD, Walsh join activists in Prayer Service”  
<http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2014/12/30/walsh-bpd-officials-join-activists-prayer-service-roxbury/S0Z7H6Gp7LttYUsXNaj3ZK/story.html>
- Braga, Anthony A. and Christopher Winship. 2009. “What Can Cities Do to Prevent Serious Youth Violence?” *Criminal Justice Matters*, 75 (1): 35 – 37.
- Braga, Anthony and Brunson, Rod. “We Trust You, But Not That Much” Examining Police-Black Clergy Partnerships to Reduce Youth Violence. *Justice Quarterly*, 2013  
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07418825.2013.868505#.VNlicUIvfgU>