

# Law Enforcement Ministry

## A New Paradigm

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### Introduction

The following paper went through multiple drafts and, in its early stages, was subjected to the scrutiny of men that I trust—Christian officers, chaplains, and ministry leaders. Several people were helpful in crafting the final draft. Their insights, suggestions, and encouragement were very helpful. Some of these same people will read what I have just written, then read what follows, and say, “Wait a minute, Tony. You hardly changed a thing from the original draft.”

Here are a couple examples. One person who reviewed the original draft suggested exercising brevity, shortening the text in certain areas. During my conversation with this person, I agreed with his assessment, yet the final draft is longer than the original draft. Another person suggested spending more time articulating the sinful, competitive spirit that can occur between law enforcement ministries. Again, I agreed with the reviewer’s suggestion, but he will likely see little by way of addition on that subject.

As I read and reread the feedback I received, and as I read and reread the original draft of this paper, I soon realized that if I imported every good suggestion given by those who read the first draft, this paper would no longer be a paper. It would be a book. And maybe that’s what’s needed—a book about law enforcement ministry. *Ah, so many books to write and so little time to write them.*

As I submit this paper to the thoughtful and discerning scrutiny of the reader, I do so fully aware that I have not answered every question. I have not affirmed or refuted every argument. And I have not provided all of the possible solutions. Providing such comprehensive commentary, counsel, and critique is beyond this writer’s level of wisdom, discernment, and knowledge. I don’t, for a moment, presume to know it all. I still have so very much to learn about serving my Lord and serving others. Admittedly, much of what I am about to offer is opinion. But I hope the reader considers it opinion based on real experience and, more importantly, considers what I put forth to be both observation and thought that is consistent with the truth of Scripture.

In the end, the greatest contribution this paper may make (and I do hope it contributes something) is the initiation of conversations between individual officers, between different small groups, and between different organized law enforcement ministries. And maybe these conversations will extend beyond talking about the theoretical to implementing the practical—more importantly, to further implementing that which is biblical.

As I wrote this paper, I did so realizing that, at times, discerning my tone of voice may be a challenge for the reader. Also, as I describe present law enforcement ministry structures, the reader may feel compelled to draw comparisons to law enforcement ministries with which they are either familiar or involved. Let me address these two concerns by asserting that at no time is this paper intended to cast aspersions upon any current law enforcement ministry or group. While I could not help but to think of existing ministries as I wrote about present trends and suggested changes, it’s important to note that I continue to enjoy fellowship and friendship with

leaders of these ministries and I look forward to continued partnership with them and the ministries they represent, for the furtherance of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I realize that the above preface could never be long enough to address every possible concern of the reader; but I need to get to the subject of this paper—what I believe are necessary paradigm shifts in law enforcement ministry.

### **Clarification of Terms**

Realizing that this paper will likely be read by members of the law enforcement family, from around the country (possibly around the world), I think it is important to clarify a couple of terms. For instance, you may see the terms “peace officer” and “cop” in this paper. I use these terms understanding that they mean different things (both positive and negative) to different sub-groups within the law enforcement sub-culture. If/when the terms “peace officer” or “cop” appear in this text, they are used with the utmost respect for the entire law enforcement family.

The term “law enforcement community” represents *all* members of this community—deputy sheriffs, police officers, constables, marshals, rangers, and federal agents. The term represents sworn, reserve, and retired members of this community. The term represents those assigned to patrol, custodial settings (juvenile facilities, county jails, and state and federal prisons), courts, and detective divisions. The term represents line officers, supervisors, and administrators. The term includes civilian members of law enforcement organizations—dispatchers, secretaries, crime analysts, property and evidence custodians, and jailers.

The term “law enforcement community” *most certainly* includes the family members of all of the above listed people—spouses, children, siblings, and parents.

The law enforcement community is indeed a large family, with every person playing an important role in the health, effectiveness, and professionalism of the family. Undoubtedly, as I’ve tried to define the term “law enforcement community,” I have left out certain important designations and titles that appear within the community. What I’ve tried to express in the above definition is that the law enforcement community is a very large community, numbering in the millions in the United States alone. If you are a member of a law enforcement agency, as defined in state and federal statutes, you are part of the law enforcement community.

### **A Few Words from the Family**

I have been speaking with my pastor, who is also a chaplain for my department. We have been discussing distributing your book to my fellow officers, and trying to start a Bible study. What are your experiences and suggestions?

Out of 50 officers, there are only a couple of us who are outgoing about our faith. I am also concerned that with a only a small percentage of officers professing to be Christians (this may be an assumption) that other officers will be driven away by us when we stumble from time to time.

Just thought I would drop you a line in an attempt to keep from re-inventing the wheel. Thank you and God bless.

*From an Officer in Indiana*

I work for a small agency with a staff of 26. Our department has no chaplain program. The majority of the staff does not appear to be believers. At times, I feel like I am on the outside because of this.

I feel this overwhelming sense of relief since going to [a local law enforcement fellowship] . . . The toughest part of this business is trusting people (including those with whom I work). I feel somewhat safe with the [fellowship] so far. I am new to Christianity. I appreciate you making yourself available for someone as new as me.

*From an Officer in Northern California*

The reason for this e-mail is two-fold. First, [I want] to say how great the book is and how it is making a difference on the street. Second, I am in the process of becoming a chaplain with my department. I would like to pick your brain a little to where the stumbling blocks are.

*From a Sergeant in Southern California*

I am interested in possibly pursuing a career path similar to yours. I have been employed with my city for about nine years and have one more year until I am vested for early retirement. I am carefully praying for guidance about how to proceed.

Your web page mentioned you raise all of your own funding as a missionary. Transitioning from a very secure law enforcement salary and pension to raising one's own support is a scary venture—especially for the wife. I was wondering if you have any advice to give. How did you do it?

*From an Officer in Colorado*

I'm the wife of a very loving officer. I believe he has e-mailed you in the past . . . I think we need more men and women protecting our streets and jails, who have the fear and love of God in them. The reason for my e-mail is to ask what I can do as a wife to support and encourage my better half to be [godly] while he is working and [while he is] off-duty with friends from work. I pray non-stop for him. Is there a Christian support website for a cop's wife?

*From the Spouse of a Southern California Officer*

The above correspondences are a sampling of some of the e-mails I have received in the last several weeks. I share these correspondences fully aware that I am not the only leader in law enforcement ministry that receives such correspondences.

None of the above people know one another, yet they have much in common—more than their personal connection to the law enforcement family. Their stories are different, but they are all looking for the same thing—“back-up.”

Over the last eighteen years of involvement in law enforcement ministry (from participant to leader), I have been blessed to meet and work with many members of the law enforcement family who love Jesus Christ and who love their brothers and sisters behind the badge. They represent the individual Christian officer, the small group leader, and the leaders of nationally recognized ministries. To a person, their commitment to reaching the law enforcement family with the gospel of Jesus Christ and their willingness to sacrifice their time and resources with the hope of completing that mission is genuine.

Individual officers, small group fellowships, and large ministries can each legitimately report that their efforts are bearing fruit. Each can point to examples of the Lord using their efforts to bring members of the law enforcement family to a genuine relationship with Christ. Law enforcement ministries are being used by the Lord to bring tangible, practical and spiritual support to members of the law enforcement family—not only in North America, but also around the world.

As I describe what I believe to be the present model of law enforcement ministry, I do so fully aware that not all law enforcement ministries fit the following mold. The purpose of this paper is *not* to suggest a wholesale dismantling of existing law enforcement ministries, nor is the purpose of this paper, in any way, to minimize the legitimate spiritual work being accomplished by those groups and/or individuals who are committed to ministering to the law enforcement community. Rather, the purpose of this paper is to assert that if the two primary goals of law enforcement ministry (namely the discipleship of saved officers and the evangelization of unsaved officers) are going to be achieved, for the glory of God, then a significant paradigm shift *must* take place in the vision and strategy for ministering to the law enforcement family.

## **The Present Model of Law Enforcement Ministry**

### **Larger, Structured Ministries**

Many structured law enforcement ministries consist of a single officer or chaplain (such as Ten-Four Ministries) or a small group of officers who do most of the work. Very few leaders of these ministries serve their particular ministry in a full-time capacity. Most law enforcement ministry leaders are full-time officers who devote as much time as they can to the ministry.

Many law enforcement ministries follow what I call a “top-down” or hierarchal ministry structure. Considering the paramilitary structure of most (if not all) law enforcement agencies, coupled with the mindset within certain segments of the body of Christ that looks at Christian ministry the same way the secular world looks at operating a business, the fact that officers choose such familiar structures for law enforcement ministry should come as no surprise. The creation of the organization might go something like this.

An officer or group of officers decides to form a law enforcement ministry. They do so because of their desire to see Christian officers support one another and because they genuinely desire to see their brothers and sisters behind the badge come to faith in Christ. They also do so because they are either unaware of any other existing law enforcement ministries or small groups in their area, or they are disillusioned by what they believe to be the ineffectiveness of existing law enforcement ministries. They are determined to do it better.

A name for the organization is chosen, followed by discussion of a logo design that will help to not only identify the organization, but also help to distinguish the new organization from other law enforcement ministries. Leadership for the organization is determined, followed by the selection of officers—such as President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary. Once the leadership is in place, the discussion turns to determining the organization’s vision, purpose, and strategy. Having settled these issues, the conversation may turn toward subjects like acquiring tax-exempt status, incorporation, raising support, creating a mailing list, publishing a ministry newsletter, determining membership requirements, the formation of chapters, and planning a “kick-off” event (such as a breakfast, banquet, or conference).

When the meeting is over (maybe several hours after it started), everyone in the room is exhausted, but excited and determined to work the plan and complete the mission. Areas of

responsibility are determined, marching orders are given and accepted, the date and time for the next meeting is chosen, and a law enforcement ministry is born.

Anticipation builds, activity reaches a fevered pitch, and the adrenalin is really pumping the day of the “kick-off” event. Friends and family of the officers who formed the organization take their seats. Other Christian officers trickle in, curious about the *new* ministry. But there are a lot of empty chairs, and only a couple unsaved officers are present.

Those present enjoy the morning or evening. The leaders of the organization put their spin on the event—doing so with the best and most sincere intentions. *If even one unsaved officer heard the gospel, then it was all worth it. We’ll learn from our mistakes (if there were any) and the next event will be bigger and better.*

Once the organization has its first event under its belt, the focus often shifts to expanding the organization’s sphere of influence through mailings or maybe the development of a website.

After a period of time, which could be months or even years, the size and the effectiveness of the ministry may begin to be determined by the size of the organization’s mailing list, rather than by the lives of members of the law enforcement family actually impacted by the ministry’s work. If the organization has grown to the point of having chapters or groups, spanning a large geographic area, the likelihood is that the leaders of the parent organization are unaware of the commitment and/or activity of the individual chapters/groups. Even less likely is that the ministry leaders have any idea what is being taught within the chapters/groups, if the chapters/groups are engaged in regular Bible study. These negative ministry dynamics are *unlikely* due to a lack of concern by the ministry leaders. Rather, the cause is probably a simple matter of time and logistics. The leaders of the ministry (again, most of whom are full-time officers) do not have the time and/or resources to maintain a close accountability relationship with smaller groups spread across the country.

Another negative dynamic that can appear in law enforcement ministry is an “inward focus.” I cannot think of any law enforcement ministry with which I am personally familiar that started with an “inward focus.” However, some law enforcement ministries grow (or shrink) to the point that the organization exists simply to keep the organization alive. The underlying (and maybe unspoken) goal of keeping the organization going overshadows the primary goal of reaching lost officers with the gospel. So much time and energy is spent keeping the organization afloat that there is little time and energy left for the leaders of the organization to evangelize the lost in their target mission field.

This “inward focus” can also represent a “my kingdom” mentality—a mentality that can be overt or subconscious in the hearts, minds, and behavior of ministry leaders. Such negative dynamics are also prevalent within the North American body of Christ. Sadly, as is the case with too many churches, law enforcement ministries do not always play well with others—meaning, there is, at times, a spirit of competition instead of a spirit of cooperation between law enforcement ministries. Instead of working together to further the kingdom of God, ministry leaders become more concerned about maintaining the autonomy, sphere of influence, and support base of the organization. Such an “inward focus” or “my kingdom” mentality can lead ministry leaders to ask questions like: “If we support what other ministries are doing, will it take attention and support away from what we are doing?” Or, “If other ministries form (especially in our area), will they move into ‘our territory,’ or worse, will they try to absorb our ministry into theirs?” Instead of supporting other Christ-centered ministries, the leaders of the organization become suspicious of the motives and strategy of other ministries.

Meanwhile, as this lack of Christian cooperation is allowed to fester, and as law enforcement ministries struggle to do the work by themselves with their limited resources, and as law enforcement ministries turn inward in their focus because keeping the ministry alive becomes the all-important (if unspoken or even unrecognized) goal, the individual Christian officer remains alone and without “back-up,” and unsaved members of the law enforcement family are not hearing the gospel.

Again, I cannot think of a single law enforcement ministry that began hoping for such negative and unbiblical results. But I believe that what I’ve just described rings true within some segments of the law enforcement ministry community. As I stated previously, what I’ve just described should in no way be interpreted as an indictment of *any* larger, Christian law enforcement ministries. Nor should what I’ve just described be interpreted as a blanket statement against the use of banquets, breakfasts, conferences, and the like as a means for ministering to Christian officers and reaching lost officers with the gospel. More about this later.

### **Smaller Law Enforcement Fellowships**

There are likely hundreds, if not thousands, of small law enforcement fellowships around the country—groups comprised of anywhere from three or four to a dozen officers. Some of these groups include spouses, which is wonderful. Since small groups can experience many of the same positive and negative dynamics found in larger ministries, my observations regarding smaller law enforcement fellowships will be brief.

The group with which I am so blessed to fellowship consists of about a dozen people (deputies, probation officers, court reporters, and administrative staff). We meet every Wednesday at the Sylmar Juvenile Court and Detention facility, during the lunch hour. Our time together consists of sharing prayer requests and Bible study. While two of the deputies in the group are looked upon as the leaders of our group, there is no formal structure. What holds the group together is the common bond of Jesus Christ, and the shared experiences and concerns that come with working in the judicial and law enforcement environments.

I believe most small law enforcement fellowships look fairly similar to what I just described. I also believe that most small law enforcement fellowships, like the one in which I participate, are not looking to be a part of a larger organization. In fact, the likelihood is that many (if not most) of these small fellowships around North America are unaware that some of the larger law enforcement ministries exist. Or, they may be aware of larger law enforcement ministries, but because of prior negative experiences with such groups, they are leery of going down that road again.

Based on conversations I have had with Christian officers across North America, I believe individual officers and small fellowships are simply looking for “back-up,” not supervision. They are looking to network with other Christian officers in their area and abroad—hoping that such a network will serve to provide encouragement during difficult times; to provide counsel regarding starting, maintaining, or leading a small law enforcement fellowship; and to simply provide the peace of mind that comes with knowing that they are not alone in an environment that can be very hostile toward committed Christians and the gospel.

Like the larger law enforcement ministries, small law enforcement fellowships can suffer from the same “inward focus” that can paralyze larger ministries. Once a small group is formed, it is very easy for the members of the group, over time, to begin looking at the fellowship as *their* group. The group may slowly shift from being a fellowship in which members are encouraged to

share their faith with the lost and invite unsaved officers to be part of the fellowship, to a Christian club in which new people, particularly the unsaved, are not readily welcomed.

When such negative dynamics take place, discipleship and mutual accountability may be replaced by war stories, grumbling about the department, and even gossip. Spiritual growth is stunted. Evangelism is non-existent. And if there is any tangible fruit, it is often old, dried, and withered. More often than not, such small groups suffering from such maladies are short-lived and those involved are left disillusioned. Sadder still, is that some groups suffering from such maladies experience a very slow and long death, often without the people in the group realizing that the group is dying. The groups will linger for years with the only benefit of the group's existence being the personal enjoyment of the few members that remain.

Some small law enforcement fellowships evolve into structured organizations. This evolution takes place because those involved in the small group have a vision for ministry that extends beyond the group, which is not necessarily a negative thing. This evolution also takes place as small groups determine to provide “back-up” for other officers—“back-up” they feel they have not received from existing organizations. As these small groups form into structured organizations, doing so with the best of intentions, they can quickly fall into the same patterns of some existing organizations—operating the same broken wheel they vowed not to re-invent. The cycle of ineffective law enforcement ministry continues. And Christian officers around the country remain with the feeling that they are alone and without “back-up.”

In order for law enforcement ministry to be truly effective and, more importantly, biblical, a paradigm shift must take place.

## **Necessary Cultural Shifts within Christian Law Enforcement Ministry**

### **From U.S.O to M.A.S.H. Unit**

A cultural shift must take place from focusing on gathering events that traditionally bear little fruit, to creating environments where officers (saved and unsaved) can gather for emotional and spiritual repair, and where the biblical therapeutic treatments of discipleship and mutual accountability can take place. Small groups—healthy groups that have not deteriorated into inwardly focused clubs and/or cliques—are the most practical and effective place for such care to take place.

This is not to say that gathering events should not take place. This is simply to say that instead of gathering events being the driving force of law enforcement ministry, they should be used to augment effective small group ministry.

### **From the Pentagon to the Trenches**

A cultural shift must take place from a centralized hub of activity and leadership, ministering to officers from afar, to spiritually equipping Christian officers to better serve on the front line of battle. There must be a shift away from determining the value and effectiveness of a ministry by the size of its mailing list, to making such determinations based upon the amount of tangible fruit cultivated in the field. The command of the Lord is to “go and make disciples” (Matt. 28:18-20). The command is not to build an organization or craft an event and wait for the people (in this case, officers) to come.

### **From Covert Operatives to Ambassadors**

A cultural shift must take place away from the all-too-often accepted “closet Christian” mentality among Christian officers—one that has distorted the concept of “friendship/relational”

evangelism to the point that “a ministry of presence” deteriorates into “a ministry of silence”—to boldly proclaiming the gospel with our voices, always “with gentleness and respect” (I Peter 3:15).

The notion that if *all* we do is behave like Christians (something no one is able to do 24/7, certainly in the law enforcement community) unsaved officers will approach us, ask what is different about us, and ask what they must do to be saved is the rare exception, not the general rule. Yes, the Christian officer should strive to live in such a way that he or she models Christ-likeness. And yes, Christian officers should try to cultivate relationships with unbelievers—inside and outside the law enforcement community. But the reality is that many Christians (I would go as far as to say most) who are firmly committed to a “friendship/relational” model of evangelism put so much time, energy, and emotion into building relationships that when it comes time to share the gospel, most Christians don’t. They don’t for fear of damaging the relationships they worked so hard to build.

Our relationship to our fellow man inadvertently becomes more important than lost sinners’ relationship to the holy and righteous God. Man’s reconciliation to man begins to take precedence over man’s reconciliation to God, through Jesus Christ the Lord. It is important to note that the only thing that will differentiate the unsaved “good cop” from the saved “good cop,” in the minds of unbelieving officers, will be the proclamation of the gospel. It is the gospel that has the power to save (Romans 1:16-17), not our ability to develop relationships.

Christian officers must begin to see themselves as ambassadors for Christ (II Cor. 5:20), not covert operatives. Evangelism must shift from an afterthought to the forethought, from the secondary goal to the primary goal of law enforcement ministry.

### **From Pluralism to Evangelism**

A cultural shift must take place away from either seeking to accommodate every unbelieving person and/or group, or fearing the consequences of not bowing the knee to the idolatry that is pluralism, to reaching every unbeliever with the gospel of Jesus Christ. While most Christian law enforcement ministries with which I am familiar are evangelical and are led by officers committed to the gospel, many individual Christian officers are fearful of making a stand for their faith because of the potential negative impact making such a stand can have upon them socially and professionally. Such fear stems from many factors, such as a lack of discipleship, a lack of mutual accountability, and (not to be redundant) the sense that they are alone without any to whom they can turn for “back-up.”

While it is true that many Christian officers fail to share their faith with their unbelieving brothers and sisters behind the badge because of the reasons mentioned above, I believe one of the primary reasons—a reason many may not want to consider, let alone talk about—is described in the following passage of Scripture.

But though He had performed so many signs before them, *yet* they were not believing in Him; that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke, "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?" For this cause they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, "HE HAS BLINDED THEIR EYES, AND HE HARDENED THEIR HEART; LEST THEY SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND PERCEIVE WITH THEIR HEART, AND BE CONVERTED, AND I HEAL THEM." These things Isaiah said, because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him.



Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing *Him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.

John 12:37-43

Every Christian officer (this writer included) must carefully look at the reasons they have failed to share their faith (meaning a verbal articulation of the entirety of the gospel) with their unsaved brethren and ask themselves these very direct questions: “Have I failed to share my faith with other officers because I fear losing the approval (professionally and socially) of my fellow officers? Is my relationship with unsaved officers more important to me than my own relationship with the Lord? Is compliance with a fallen society’s social standards more important to me than obeying the Word of God?”

Christian officers must not be afraid to boldly proclaim a bias toward Jesus Christ, even in the face of any unbiblical agenda that would try to force Christians to accept worldly systems and/or the sinfulness of mankind. Christians must not acquiesce by taking the path of least resistance when the issues at hand surround essential Christian doctrine. Doctrine does matter (II Timothy 4:1-5; Titus 1:9).

As Chaplain Gary Raymond from New South Wales, Australia, rightly says, “We’re on a battleship, not a luxury liner. The time for a cruise will come later. For now, in this world, we’re at war.” And part of the battle to which God has called every believer is a defense of the faith (I Peter 3:13-18) and a bold, unashamed proclamation of the gospel (Romans 1:16-17).

### **From Separation to Assimilation**

A cultural shift must take place away from law enforcement ministry and fellowship replacing the church, to law enforcement ministry and fellowship being an integral part of the Church (Heb. 10:25). In some segments of law enforcement ministry (in both the small group setting and larger organizations), an unbiblical mindset has been allowed to flourish—one that believes that cops can only fellowship with other cops.

Law enforcement ministries and small groups must be very intentional to encourage, even mandate, participants to assimilate into a Christ-centered, local body of believers. And when officers are identified as separating from the local body of Christ, mutual accountability, discipleship, and (when necessary) discipline must be the call of the day.

### **From “My Kingdom” to “His Kingdom”**

A cultural shift must take place from thinking about *how this will affect the ministry or group, or what will we gain from this*, to *how will this glorify Christ and how can I provide my brother with “back-up.”* Sadly (as previously mentioned), segments of the authentic body of Christ do not work well together. Law enforcement ministries and small groups suffer from the same sin. Spirits of territorialism, pride, and even greed are, in part, what keeps Christian law enforcement ministries from partnering with other ministries to accomplish Kingdom work.

Not wanting to belabor the point, suffice it to say that the old philosophy that puts autonomy before and over cooperation and support has not worked. Nor will it ever work—because it is unbiblical (Phil. 2:1-4).

## A Wheel That Works

The wheel that has represented the philosophy of law enforcement ministry, for the last thirty years, looks something like this. The center or hub of the wheel represents the individual law enforcement ministry or fellowship. The spokes of the wheel represent members of the organization and/or chapters. The outer rim of the wheel represents the law enforcement community.

A biblical wheel design is this. Jesus Christ is the center or hub of the wheel. The spokes of the wheel represent law enforcement ministries or fellowships. The outer rim of the wheel represents the law enforcement community.

It is Jesus Christ who connects Christian law enforcement ministries and fellowships, one with another. Because of each organization and group's commitment to Christ, each organization and group shares a commitment to support each other (the other spokes in the wheel). The purpose of such a cooperative effort is to fulfill the two greatest commandments, to love God first and to love others (Matt. 22:36-40). With each spoke of the wheel firmly connected to Christ (the hub), and firmly committed to supporting every other spoke; the result will be a stronger connection to and support of the rim (the law enforcement community)—encouraging and supporting those who already know Christ and bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ to those who are lost without Him.

## A Net That Works

Now it came about that while the multitude were pressing around Him and listening to the word of God, He was standing by the lake of Gennesaret; and He saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake; but the fishermen had gotten out of them, and were washing their nets.

And He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And He sat down and *began* teaching the multitudes from the boat. And when He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch."

And Simon answered and said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but at Your bidding I will let down the nets." And when they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish; and their nets *began* to break; and they signaled to their partners in the other boat, for them to come and help them. And they came, and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink.

Luke 5:1-7

I first learned of the concept of "a net that works," from Chaplain Jack Crans of Chester County, PA. The idea is that a net is stronger and more efficient if many fishermen hold a portion of the net and work together to catch fish. If a fisherman drops his part of the net, the net will be less efficient and fewer fish will likely be caught. Applying this analogy to law enforcement ministry, if many law enforcement ministries and small groups network for the purpose of seeing more members of the law enforcement family come to faith in Jesus Christ, and for the purpose of seeing Christian officers grow in their faith, law enforcement ministry (as a whole) will certainly be stronger than it is. Let's take a closer look at the above passage.

The scene opens with two fishing crews next to their boats, which were beached along the shore. The two crews were cleaning their nets after an evening of unsuccessful fishing. Jesus approaches the men and tells them to put back out into deep water and let down their nets.

I love to fish. Before he died, my dad and I spent countless hours fishing together at our favorite lake. If my dad saw me spending too much time fiddling with my gear—changing the set-up or changing bait, with frustration in his voice he would say, “You can’t catch fish if your line is not in the water.”

In law enforcement ministry (and this likely applies to all forms of ministry), it is possible to get so wrapped up in the preparation and logistics of doing ministry that those involved in the ministry spend so much time talking about or planning activities that they spend little time actually ministering to the law enforcement family. Worse yet, law enforcement ministries can spend so much time worrying about the condition of their own nets (sphere of influence, notoriety, support base), they never think to partner with other ministries.

I never thought I would talk about fishing and the American Civil War when addressing the same topic, but here it goes. General George McClellan was known as a master logistician. And his men loved him for some wrong reasons. Early in the war, General McClellan commanded the entire Union Army. He spent massive amounts of time and money preparing the army to fight. His troops loved him because he worked tirelessly to make sure they had the equipment they needed, good food, and plenty of training. They also loved him for another reason that is far less impressive.

General McClellan refused to get into the fight. No matter how many men he had under his charge, no matter how much time his troops spent in drill, General McClellan consistently believed his army needed more time, more training, and more men. Just like the fisherman who cannot catch fish if he doesn’t have his line in the water, General McClellan’s constant refusal to get into the fight resulted in a much smaller Confederate Army intimidating the larger Union forces. The Union Army looked good on paper, but the reality was that the Union Army was a large and ineffective body that lacked the will to fight. It wasn’t until the Union Army found effective leadership that the Union Army began to turn the tide on the fields of battle.

In order for a law enforcement ministry network to be effective and, more importantly, biblical, Jesus must be in the boat—just as Jesus must be the hub of the wheel. Unless Jesus Christ is the central figure in the work, unless Jesus Christ is leading the way, unless those involved in law enforcement ministry submit to the authority of Jesus Christ and follow Him into battle, law enforcement ministry will be like the fisherman with no line in the water or the well organized army with no will to fight—ineffective and weak.

Notice Peter’s first response when Jesus tells him to launch into deeper water and drop the nets. Peter said, “We worked hard all night and caught nothing.” Although Peter acknowledges the ineffectiveness of the effort, there is a hint of an attitude that I think is prevalent not only in law enforcement ministry, but in the law enforcement subculture. *We’ve always done it this way. We’re frustrated with the lack of positive results, but this is the way things are done.*

Many law enforcement ministries, and likely small fellowships as well, work *very* hard. They work very hard, yet *the catch* is small. Ministries and small groups are aware of the ineffectiveness, but they are slow (if not resistant) to making the necessary changes to turn the ministry or group’s productivity around.

Peter, however, relents and the fishermen head out to deeper water, with Jesus in the boat. Peter's crew, obedient to Jesus Christ, drops their net into the water. Soon the net is full to overflowing. So full is the net that the net begins to show signs of failing. Instead of continuing to haul the net by themselves, the crew calls to the other boat for "back-up." With more men on the net, the overall strength and effectiveness of the net is markedly improved, resulting in more fish caught. And notice that not only was Peter's boat filled with fish, but the boat that answered the call for "back-up" was also filled with fish.

By now the application of this analogy to law enforcement ministry should be obvious. For years, law enforcement ministries have suffered from a "my kingdom" mindset that has caused ministries to not call for "back-up" when help is needed and, sadder still, have not answered the call for "back-up" from other ministries or small groups. For years, law enforcement ministries have continued to repeat the same mistakes because, well, that's the way things have always been done.

Instead of worrying about cleaning, repairing, and filling individual ministry nets, the focus of law enforcement ministry should turn to building "a net that works"—developing a cooperative effort in which the emphasis turns from pleasing the fisherman or building individual fishing companies, to catching fish.

### **Building the Net**

If you have made it this far in this paper, you might be thinking that the above sounds good in theory, but how does a ministry or group take the concept from theory to practical reality. How do we build "a net that works?" Probably the easiest way for me to explain the process is to simply share how Ten-Four Ministries plans to do its part.

Since the inception of Ten-Four Ministries, I have purposed *not* to form chapters or groups. You will not find Ten-Four Ministries small groups anywhere in North America. I have traveled across North America during the last year, ministering to the law enforcement family in California, Oregon, Oklahoma, Texas, Pennsylvania, Washington DC, and Ontario (CAN). With each trip, my intentions remain the same.

I go to an area with the hope and expressed purpose of encouraging and supporting whatever law enforcement ministry is in the area—whether it is an individual officer, a small group of officers, or an established organization. My hope is that if I leave any kind of mark in a particular area, that mark will be the establishment of new relationships, the edification of Christian officers, the presentation of the gospel to the lost in the law enforcement community, and the education of the civilian body of Christ about life behind the badge. If all I leave behind is the name and notoriety of Ten-Four Ministries, then I have utterly failed in my mission. If all I accomplish is the addition of names to the Ten-Four Ministries mailing list, then I have utterly failed in my mission. If all I've done in an area is expanded my personal sphere of influence, then I have utterly failed in my mission.

When a Christian officer who is looking for counsel about forming a group or ministry contacts me, my first word of advice is to focus more on the organism rather than the organization. In other words, the focus should be on the few Christian officers in one's immediate sphere of influence—providing good "back-up" for those with whom they are closest—"back-up" such as discipleship, fellowship, and mutual accountability. My encouragement is not to focus on who will be president of the group, but who will be *present* in the group. Don't focus on who will sit

in the chair at the front of the room, but on the empty chair at the back of the room. Don't focus on names, letterhead, and logos, but on authentic spiritual growth and biblical evangelism.

When I have such conversations (and they seem to be occurring with greater frequency), it is not unusual to experience a period of silence at the other end of the phone line, after I share the above. The idea of simply serving Christ as an ambassador in one's own department, without worrying about building an organization often stuns the hearer. But after a few moments, it is not uncommon for me to hear relief in the voice of the person with whom I am speaking. It's as if a heavy weight is lifted from the person when they realize that they needn't carry the burden for developing a new ministry, and that there are people willing to provide them with spiritual and practical "back-up" when the need arises.

For Ten-Four Ministries' part, we will help to facilitate the building of "a net that works" by providing a vehicle for individual officers, small law enforcement fellowships, and larger law enforcement ministries to connect with one another—providing each other with "back-up" whenever the call comes. Ten-Four Ministries will use our website (already an effective tool) to establish a place where the before mentioned people and groups can find other Christian officers and/or groups in their area, with which to fellowship. We will develop a location on the website where officers can turn to look for law enforcement fellowships and/or organizations in their area. I hope other ministries will do the same.

If no such fellowship or organization exists in the officer's area, we will come alongside the officer to help him start a fellowship within his department—helping him by way of encouragement, fellowship, and, when warranted, mutual accountability. When we come alongside an officer to start a new fellowship, the purpose *will not* be to form a Ten-Four Ministries group or chapter. Such a new work will be autonomous. No fellowship or organization appearing on the Ten-Four Ministries website's network page will be under the authority of Ten-Four Ministries.

We will encourage the officers involved in any law enforcement fellowship or organization, regardless of size, to seek individual accountability from the leadership of their home church. The Centurion Fellowship, which is Ten-Four Ministries' online law enforcement fellowship, will provide an additional layer of encouragement, discipleship, and mutual accountability, for those who choose to participate.

Ten-Four Ministries' commitment is to provide "back-up" to any officer, fellowship, or organization that asks—doing so to the extent that the Lord provides the time and resource to answer the call—whether it is through the network, the "10-33 Fund," the "Centurion Fellowship," or one-on-one correspondence. Again, the goal is not to further the kingdom of Ten-Four Ministries, but to edify the body of Christ and to further the kingdom of God.

### **So What About Conferences, Banquets, and Seminars?**

Just in case I have left anyone with the impression that I am against the use of conferences, banquets, seminars, or other "gathering events" for reaching the lost in the law enforcement family with the gospel, allow me to set the record straight. I have participated in and helped to organize a number of gathering-type events—including seminars, conferences, banquets, retreats, and law enforcement appreciation services. And I will continue to partner with groups, ministries, and churches in these endeavors so long as the goal is bringing the gospel to the law enforcement community and edifying the body of Christ within that community.

Being familiar with some of the larger law enforcement ministries in the country, and having participated as a member of one and a leader in another, most (not all) larger law enforcement ministries lack the financial resources and practical experience to coordinate and host a large-scale event. Yet some ministries press on, year after year, spending time, energy, and resources trying to right the ship—trying to host large events that ultimately bear little fruit and reach very few unsaved officers with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I believe the answer is simple, but it means that law enforcement ministries have to be willing to give up control of events and commit to partnering not only with other law enforcement ministries, but also with Christian organizations that have no immediate connection to the law enforcement community. Here's a case in point.

Ten-Four Ministries, Peace Officers for Christ International, and Shield of Faith Ministry partnered last year with Hume Lake Christian Camps (CA), in Hume's annual Police Couples' Retreat. Hume (as I am sure can be said of other Christian camps around the country) has written the book on weeklong and weekend conferences. In fact, my wife, Mahria, came to faith in Christ during a Hume Lake Police Couples' Retreat, in 1988.

Hume Lake possesses the resources, facilities and literally decades of experience in organizing and hosting conferences and retreats. And they are very good at it. The combined resources and experience of Ten-Four Ministries, Peace Officers for Christ International, and Shield of Faith Ministry comes nowhere close to that of Hume Lake, as it pertains to hosting large-scale events. Hume Lake has hosted Police Couples' Conferences for years. Instead of individual law enforcement ministries trying (and failing) to duplicate Hume's expertise and success, the better course of action is to partner with Hume Lake in their already successful efforts. How law enforcement ministries can compliment Hume Lake's efforts (and I believe we did last year) is by serving as technical advisors—suggesting topics for seminars and suggesting possible keynote speakers—and by helping to “get the word out” to the law enforcement community. The law enforcement family responds more positively to the endorsement or encouragement of a brother or sister officer than a flyer in a mailbox or on a bulletin board (not that we shouldn't do these things, too).

Partnering with well-established Christian camps to host and organize conferences and retreats relieves much of the financial, organizational, and advertising burdens from the shoulders of law enforcement ministries. The benefit to the Christian camp is that their partnership with law enforcement ministries will improve their effectiveness in reaching the larger law enforcement community and will help them to establish real credibility with the same.

Other Christian camp organizations that host good law enforcement conferences and retreats include Word Of Life (with facilities and inns around the country) and Mount Hermon Christian Camp (CA). I am sure there are others. My encouragement to larger law enforcement ministries that have large-scale events as part of their ministry strategy is to establish relationships and form partnerships with well-established Christian camps (and churches for that matter) and watch your effectiveness increase.

## **Okay, So What Can Smaller Law Enforcement Ministries and Groups Do to Reach Out?**

Groups of Christians will not likely reach out to the lost if the individual members of the group are not actively engaged in sharing the gospel with unbelievers. So, my first suggestion is for the members of small groups to develop or rekindle a sense of urgency when it comes to evangelism.

Having accomplished this, my next suggestion to the members of a small fellowship is to not think so globally that the group bites off more than it can chew—setting itself up for disappointment and discouragement. In other words, don't think big. Think fruit and effectiveness. Don't try to plan large-scale events. Rather, invite members of the law enforcement family to more personal and intimate times of fellowship. Think potluck dinners, not catered dinners. Think Bible study, not seminars. Think personal testimonies, not public speakers. Think a day at the beach or in a park, not conferences and retreats. Think living room, not large venues. Think personal invitation, not expensive and time-consuming forms of advertisement. At the end of the day, you don't want to be left with two hundred pounds of hamburger meat, three hundred hot dogs, twelve hundred buns, and twenty dozen donuts.

And don't give up!

If you (or your group) set up a time for fellowship, with the hope of inviting unbelieving officers and their families to participate, and no one shows up, don't give up. Consistency is a very important key to establishing an effective law enforcement fellowship. Whether it is one night a week, a couple of nights a month, or just once a month, you need to be consistent. You need to persevere. Keep meeting. Keep inviting. Keep sharing the gospel. Keep praying.

## **Are We Forgetting Somebody?**

A dynamic that may not be exclusive to the law enforcement community, but is certainly prevalent in the law enforcement community is the attempt by officers to compartmentalize their lives. In other words, officers (Christians and non-Christians) will often try to keep separate their work life from their home life, and vice versa. It is impossible to do, even though officers often delude themselves by thinking that they can separate the two. Work inevitably spills into one's home life. And home life, good or bad, often follows an officer to work.

Not enough is being done in law enforcement ministry to reach out to and minister to the spouses of police officers. Too often, whether intentional or not, spouses are treated as secondary members of an organization or fellowship. This is not to say that all law enforcement ministry activities must include spouses and other family members. There are times when it may be appropriate to limit the fellowship to only officers. But spouses and family members must be considered in every aspect of ministry.

If a ministry or small group has developed or perpetuated a mindset that encourages or allows officers to compartmentalize their lives, then the ministry or small group is unhealthy. If officers cannot enjoy Christian fellowship with other officers, with their spouses present, then these officers must be held accountable and helped to develop a more healthy and biblical mindset.

Law enforcement ministries must come to realize (if they haven't already) that if you strengthen the marriage, and if you strengthen the family, then you strengthen the officer. And if you help the officer to mature in his or her faith, with an aspect of that maturity being the

decompartmentalization of the officer's life, then you also strengthen the marriage and the family.

Every member of the law enforcement community must come to realize that their first ministry is just inside the door of their own home. It's time for law enforcement ministry to become much more intentional about including spouses not only in the law enforcement community, but also in law enforcement ministry.

### **The Future of Law Enforcement Ministry**

In conclusion, I believe the future of law enforcement ministry, if it is to be a healthy and biblical future, is not going to be found in the formation of more large organizations. Rather, I believe the future will be found in a healthy and biblical network comprised of individual officers and small fellowships. As I previously stated, I am not calling for a wholesale dismantling of existing law enforcement ministries, nor am I calling for larger ministries to do away with their chapter or area representative structures. But if larger law enforcement ministries want to continue to develop effective strategies for reaching lost officers with the gospel and encouraging those officers who already know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior to grow in their faith, then they must put greater emphasis on developing healthy, biblical small groups.

With that said, I do hope that existing ministries will share Ten-Four Ministries' commitment to "a net that works"—a commitment to provide our brothers and sisters behind the badge with "back-up" by fulfilling the two greatest commandments and the great commission, without having our eyes fixed on the growth of an individual ministry.

And to Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords, be all the glory.