

police_60203

May 31, 2003

Posted: 5/30/03

Fort Worth program places ministers alongside police officers

By John Hall

Texas Baptist Communications

FORT WORTH—Some Baptists are known for stands against dancing and drinking and smoking, but Randy Austin wants to let Fort Worth know Baptists also will take a stand against crime.

The chief of security at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary is one of 37 ministers across faith lines participating in Ministers Against Crime, a federally funded initiative in Fort Worth. It enables ministers help connect police officers to the community and minister to the needs of residents. The effort is one of 13 faith-based partnerships with police departments around the nation.

Ministers are trained through the police academy so they can better understand the work and stresses of police officers. The training also involves understanding the mindset and needs of crime victims.

The police department furnishes ministers with pagers, cell phones and credentials so the clergy can be contacted to help at the scene of an incident.

While many people in high-crime areas distrust police officers and refuse to

speak to them, officers found community residents easily open up to pastors, said Sgt. Mark Thorne, liaison between the Fort Worth Police Department and Ministers Against Crime.

Officers also noticed people responded better to pastors' words than rebukes by police, Thorne explained at a Baptist General Convention of Texas-sponsored session during the Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse Conference in Austin. Ministers are connected to entire families and are credible in the neighborhoods, he continued.

By partnering law enforcement with ministers, officers have found it easier to connect with the neighborhoods they serve, Thorne noted. People are more willing to speak with them, and trust has increased.

People who are initially rude with officers often become very friendly when they see a minister standing beside the lawperson, Thorne said. Because of this, ministers have helped resolve issues people have with officers.

“We are out there to help build bridges to the community,” Austin emphasized.

But the ministers' work does not stop there. Thorne commonly calls on them to pray for specific situations and times of need. The ministers then enlist their congregations to pray for God's help.

Specifically challenged one day by a non-believer to “see what your God can do,” Thorne quickly asked the ministers to start praying over an area. The church leaders did, he said, and the crime rate dropped 50 percent that month. Prayer has calmed riotous vibes in the community as well, he said.

“We have tapped into a resource in Fort Worth that is changing our community,” Thorne happily declared.

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.