

Voices: Lessons from the day my sons met the police

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Two Dallas-area dads provide a glimpse into their concerns for their sons and how they are building relationships between them and law enforcement. Read the companion article [here](#).

Over the past year, numerous events once again exposed the racism that exists in our nation and in our local communities. As the father of two Black boys, I have seen firsthand how this racism affects them. They've experienced it personally while praying and marching for justice for others like Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd.

Our sons have seen even police—especially police—need education and training when it comes to systemic racism. Last month, at the height of the Derek Chauvin trial coupled with other police shootings and altercations, our sons expressed concern and curiosity for how our city prepares and equips our police.

They were afraid of what life will be like for them, seeing how the goodwill built last summer during the marches for justice had turned to harsh pushback by others who do not want to address racism. They noticed how adults reacted and what they said.

Leadership and courage of children

As a result, my wife and I decided to reach out to our city's new police chief, Chief Al Jones, and see if we could have a few minutes of his time to talk to our sons about the Arlington Police Department. Chief Jones's office was gracious to schedule a meeting for us quickly.

We arrived at our appointment and were escorted back to his conference room, where he let our sons sit at the head of the table while he sat beside them to talk. Our 11-year-old came with a list of questions he had prepared. To our surprise, our 7-year-old had some profound questions of his own.

They asked the chief a wide array of questions, including why he decided to be a police officer and how the police catch people speeding, to how they train the police officers to value different cultures, how they deal with racism, and how they “make sure Arlington cops don’t do to people in Arlington what was done to George Floyd.”

Chief Jones took time to answer each question, providing key insights to what makes Arlington different from other police departments, emphasizing the importance the department places on training and education of their officers. He also was impressed with the issues our sons asked him to address, and the leadership and courage they demonstrated in being good citizens by asking bold and important questions.

Following 30 minutes of Q&A, Chief Jones took them back to his office, gave them a special medallion, and took his picture with them. He then had one of his fellow officers give us a tour of the entire facility—the temporary juvenile holding area, the 911 call center, the press room, detective offices—culminating in our sons having the opportunity to sit in the front seat of a squad car, talk on the loudspeaker, and turn on the lights.

After more than hour with the Arlington Police Department, we headed home, thankful for Chief Jones’ willingness to listen and to lead on issues of racism.

Leadership and courage of adults

This type of leadership is not accidental. We are thankful for the emphasis Arlington police place on training and awareness when it comes to racism,

their acknowledgement of the racism present in our communities, and the great responsibility our police have to make our communities safe, which involves more than just “arresting criminals.”

In fact, that was one of our son’s questions: “How will the Arlington police make sure I am safe?” He wasn’t talking about being safe from random crime; he was talking about his personal safety as a Black boy.

It was a positive, informative afternoon. We were thankful to hear from the chief. And we were thankful the chief was willing to hear from our boys.

What is the takeaway from meetings like this? Certainly, it helps citizens to hear from the police about how they train and prepare their officers. Hopefully, police hearing from their citizens is a helpful reminder to the police why they must commit to training and education related to systemic racism and prejudice.

Let us be brave

Those impacted by systemic racism are not just statistics, but real human beings of all ages.

As we think about the society our sons are growing up in, I am reminded of a letter Austin Channing Brown wrote to her then-unborn son in her book, *I’m Still Here*. She discussed what she and her husband were anticipating about his coming birth, and what they were dreading.

“We have been avoiding talking about the first time you will be pulled over by a cop because you look suspicious,” Channing Brown wrote. “We have been avoiding talking about the many assumptions people will have of you simply because God kissed your glorious skin and it blushed at the attention. ... We would rather wonder about your humanity than ruminate on the ways the world will try to take that away from you.

“They will first think you are beautiful, innocent—and you will be. But as your baby fat disappears and your height comes to match ours, they will see you as dangerous—but we will be here to refute the lies. We will be here to remind you that you are worthy of joy and love and adventure.”

Again, what is the takeaway from our meeting? Not just that parents, like us, will see their children as Brown describes and advocate for them, but that our police, churches, institutions and systems will, as well.

May we strive to develop a beloved community that does not shy away from the difficult conversations or shrink from the needed reforms. We can support the police and hold them to a high standard of justice, demanding systemic racism be addressed and that people of color be treated with dignity and respect as God created them. May we be brave and committed to making this happen.

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