

## 10 Ways to Strengthen Relations with Police and Public Safety Officials

By C. Anthony Hunt

One key to a church's vitality is the quality of the relationships it establishes with a broad spectrum of leaders and institutions throughout its community. One of the most important set of relationships a church can develop is with police and other public safety officials. Recent well-publicized police-involved shootings and deaths, and the shootings and deaths of a number of police officers around the nation, have stained police-community relations and resulted in unrest in many areas.

Working proactively rather than reactively to strengthen a church's relationship with its surrounding community and with police engenders trust. It also helps improve the quality of life for persons living and working in particular communities. It is a part of the theological task of churches to "seek the welfare" (shalom, peace, well-being) of all people in their respective communities (Jeremiah 29:7). Individuals, churches, groups, organizations, institutions, and even governments can promote the well-being of communities by making a sincere commitment to strengthen the relationship between the church, the community, and the police.

Here are ten ways that individuals, churches, and other community organizations can work toward strengthening these relationships.

1. Pray for the police serving your community.
2. Pray for and publically affirm the police and other public safety officials who are members of your congregation.
3. Know your community police officers by name, and keep their contact information readily available. Schedule regular meetings with community police officers to establish and strengthen relationships.
4. Participate in periodic drive-arounds and community walks with police and community leaders.
5. Invite police to community events held by the church, such as back-to-school events, community meals, and food giveaways.
6. Include local police on the distribution lists for the church newsletter and email communications.
7. Seek to collaborate with community entities like the Chambers of Commerce, NAACP, community associations, PTAs, and other churches in the community across denominations and faith traditions to address common interests and concerns regarding policing and public safety.
8. Invite community police to speak to youth and young adults in the church.
9. Educate youth and adults on appropriate conduct if stopped by police.
10. Assist police departments in the recruitment of qualified persons in the congregation and community who would serve well as uniformed police officers, especially women and minorities who may be underrepresented.