



AMAZING GRACE

Seeking Grace and Forgiveness in Law Enforcement

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AMAZING GRACE

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found
Was blind, but now I see...
T'was Grace that brought us safe thus far,
And Grace will lead us home.

On the thirteenth day of May each year, thousands of people gather in Judiciary Square in Washington, D.C. As the sun draws low in the sky, buses begin to arrive, police escorts' lights and sirens announcing the survivors. Family after family disembarks, stepping down in front of the reflecting pool of the National Law Enforcement Officers' Memorial. They are handed red roses and are escorted to their seats by an officer in dress uniform. Around their necks hang their identities—their name; their status as co-worker, wife, husband, friend, survivor of a fallen officer; and the date their officer was killed in the line of duty. Surrounding them as they step forward, the memorial wall wraps around the square, garbed in wreaths, notes, pictures drawn by the children of the fallen, agency patches, people crying as they touch the engraved name of their loved one. Later, as everyone is seated and darkness has fallen, the crowd is silent as the first notes of a well known ballad pierce through the night air, echoing off stone. "Amazing Grace," a woman or man or bagpipe sings out, "how sweet the sound."

On August 9, 2002, recently graduated from the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, I received a phone call from my park superintendent, informing me that my friend and academy classmate, Kristopher William Eggle, had been murdered in the line of duty. Chasing drug smugglers



who'd driven across the Mexican border, Kris had been ambushed and shot below his body armor with an AK-47. His murderer was almost immediately shot and killed by other officers. Kris knew he was dying, dropped his duty belt and tried to stop the bleeding before crumpling to the ground. His best friend was the first on scene. Kris bled out before the ambulance reached him.

In 2003, I was a survivor at the memorial. Since that year, I have been back to National Police Week almost every May. My experiences each year stay with me, both burden and motivation. I have met many survivors, some of whom travel to the memorial every year. This year, I met a man who told me about his son who had been killed almost ten years ago. The man handed me his business card that identified him as a "Survivor," and listed his son's agency, rank, name, and end of watch.¹ His identity had become inextricably linked to the death of his son.

The death of my friend Kris is very much tied to my professional identity. And because law enforcement is a career that necessarily permeates one's personal life, it is also tied to my personal identity. Like the man with the business card, I am a survivor. And, like him, I have carried with me a great deal of anger and bitterness, not only toward the man who shot my friend, but at every person who would harm a police officer, leave a child without a mother, or a wife without a husband. It is that anger that has carried me forward in my career as a spokeswoman for officer safety, for the professionalization of law enforcement in my agency, and as a leader who puts people first. But perhaps anger is not the best motivation, for what good can come of something so dark?

Robert Greenleaf says that a servant-leader must "view any problem in the world as *in here*, inside oneself, not *out there*" (Greenleaf 1977, 57), and as such, I begin to look inside myself and at the cultural norms and assumptions I have accepted in my life and my career in order to discover how to overcome this anger and instead build positive, healthy community. Ferch quotes Brian Mitchell, a police officer who experienced South Africa's apartheid years: "As a policeman...you only see the bad side of life. You are involved in that evil side of life" (Ferch 2012, 40). As a leader in a law enforcement agency, I have experienced both the darkness that life has to offer and the joy and fulfillment that comes from a life dedicated to service to society. Robert Greenleaf, who coined the term *servant-leadership*, says that leaders must first become aware of the truth of their situation in order to lead, and while awareness might not bring a person comfort, it will allow



them to be awakened in order to better see things as they are (Greenleaf 1977, 41). Through this process, I hope to become more aware of the truth of law enforcement in society today, and my own ability as a police officer to both forgive and serve.

It is telling, I think, that the song, “Amazing Grace,” has become a central feature of police funerals, as the lyrics speak to the power of forgiveness, of our own humanity and shortcomings, and the capacity of grace to help us overcome life’s challenges. This paper discusses the power of grace, and its ability to help us overcome the personal and national consequences of the anger, bitterness, and resentment that lingers after a peace officer is killed in the line of duty. Recognizing a brokenness in law enforcement today, this paper discusses the need for a change, suggesting that police agencies adopt a servant leadership approach to organization and community relationships. I explore the role of forgiveness—both forgiveness asking and forgiveness granting—as a way of healing and moving forward, both for the family members of the fallen, and for the law enforcement profession as a whole as it carries the pain of these murders over the years. Finally, I suggest that we can create positive outcomes from the great deal of passion and energy that is created when a community comes together over such a tragedy. Ultimately, I believe that through such coming together and healing, law enforcement officer killings might be reduced on a nationwide basis.

COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

A famous Norman Rockwell painting, “The Runaway,” depicts a uniformed state trooper leaning over to help a young boy in a soda shop, an iconic ode to the reason I and my brothers and sisters in law enforcement chose this profession: to serve. The painting hangs in police stations around the country, and even graces the wall in my own office, a reminder of our mission: to help people. In today’s society, I believe that this image of the police officer as savior is often forgotten, and that the relationships between many police agencies and the communities they serve are in need of repair.

On average in the United States, a peace officer is killed in the line of duty every fifty-four hours (Officer Down Memorial Page 2012). These peace officers walk a “thin blue line” between the people of this nation and those who would hurt them, swearing their lives in the service of others, knowing that on any given day, they may be called names, spit on, stabbed, shot at, or even killed. They will be ridiculed and hated, as is evidenced



by the popular music in today's culture that pokes fun at law enforcement, video games that grant points for killing cops, and the media that smears the names of good officers who are forced to kill in the defense of self or others. I have lived my adult life knowing that many hate me, my profession, and what I stand for. Even those who say that they support law enforcement will often attack the credibility of an officer who issues them a ticket for speeding, will sing along to the lyrics of a song about killing the police, or, more commonly, will remain silent as an officer, dedicated to a life of service, is killed every other day.

It bears mention, of course, that not every police officer is honorable, and that at times may betray the trust of those they are sworn to protect. American police history is rife with stories of the violation of civil liberties, of racism and excessive force. In a recent meeting with two representatives of the gay community within my jurisdiction, they told me stories from their youth of being singled out by police because of their sexual orientation. While the officers within my agency today had not participated in those specific acts, the pain of these men remained fresh, and I empathized with their ongoing mistrust of law enforcement. By sitting down with these men for an hour on their patio, listening to their stories, and offering open and honest dialogue, we began to heal the rift between us. Because their trust had been violated, though, it was incumbent upon me to be the one to reach out.

Wiesenthal speaks to the nature of collective responsibility for crimes against persons, in reference to the atrocities committed during the Holocaust. "No German can shrug off the responsibility," he writes; "As a member of a guilty nation he cannot simply walk away like a passenger leaving a tramcar" (Wiesenthal 1998, 93). By the same token, Tutu theorizes that when a nation forgets or ignores such evils, they in effect victimize the injured parties a second time by not acknowledging their pain (Tutu 1999, 29). He writes that we must "look the beast in the eye" in order to move forward into the future (ibid., 28). Yet in the United States, more often than not, it seems to be accepted unquestioningly that officers will be killed, an unfortunate result of the dangerous jobs they do. Tutu suggests that apartheid was allowed to continue in South Africa for so long because so many people turned a blind eye, accepting the comfort of the status quo, and failing to examine the assumptions by which they lived.

Patrick writes that "[t]he protection of the lives and safety of those who enforce the law is the responsibility of the society that gives them



the mission and reaps the benefit of that service” (Patrick 2005, 45). Balic (1998) argues that “those who might appear uninvolved in the actual crimes, but who tolerate acts of torture, humiliation, and murder, are certainly also guilty. Looking away may be a comfortable but ultimately disastrous path, the effects of which are incalculable” (Wiesenthal 1998, 110). It is time for the citizens of the United States to stand behind those who choose to serve and protect them. And as a first step in this process, those of us who serve and protect must step forward and offer love and forgiveness to our communities.

LAW ENFORCEMENT IN AMERICA

National Police Week not only offers an opportunity for survivors to gather and heal, but also for the community of Law Enforcement to come together, brothers and sisters united in the same cause: to serve and protect. Martin Luther advocated a strong connection between life and work, and Thompson (2000) advocates the same today. Luther believed that vocation should be raised to “an unprecedented level of importance in the life of the individual,” imbued with “meaning and purpose” (Thompson 2000, 17). The law enforcement profession offers—even requires—this high level of dedication to work, in large part because of the immense responsibility these officers have to protect society and its citizens (Grossman and Christensen 2008). With great responsibility comes the potential for great power, and it is the acceptance of this responsibility that sets law enforcement and military apart from the large majority of society. This separation, however, need not be oppositional.

The law enforcement profession is tasked with enforcing society’s widely accepted moral rules. Wall argues that such rules are “necessary for an orderly social existence,” and asks, “What would society be like if there were no rules against lying, stealing, breaking promises, and killing each other?” (Wall 2008, 27). In a lecture to the U.S. Naval Academy, William J. Bennett argued that military (and, by extension, police) action is about honor, and “about defending those noble and worthy things that deserve defending, even if it comes at a high cost” (Grossman and Christensen 2008, 180). Police officers, then, stand united in that cause, having accepted for themselves and their families a vocation that asks of them so much. It is this common dilemma, shared goals, and dedication to vocation that bring law enforcement officers together like family.



SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

In his call for a new style of leadership, Robert Greenleaf acknowledged that “the outlook for our civilization at this moment is not promising, probably because not enough of us care enough for our fellow humans” (Greenleaf 1998, 22). As Tutu points out, “We are experiencing a radical brokenness in all of existence....Ours has been the bloodiest century known to human history” (Tutu 1999, 264). And in this world, police officers agree to stand between those who would do harm and those who would be harmed, using what means are necessary to keep society safe and peaceful. These officers accept this obligation willingly, but at the same time, law enforcement “must reckon with the fact that [the average, healthy officer] comes from a civilization in which aggression...is prohibited and unacceptable” (Grossman and Christensen 2008, 163). “Because if we did not have warriors, men and women willing to move toward the sounds of the guns and confront evil...our civilization would no longer exist” (ibid., 5). In order to reconcile these feelings, the law enforcement profession has adopted a culture that serves to separate “us” from “them”; in the words of Lt. Col. Dave Grossman (2008), “sheepdogs” and “sheep.” It is no wonder society often questions, fears, and even hates that which they believe law enforcement represents.

By the very nature of their mission to serve and protect, though, police officers have chosen to serve their fellow humans, and so are in a unique position to build community and promote healing. Greenleaf (1977) wrote that “the servant leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve” (Spears and Lawrence 2002, 1). In addition to emphasizing service to others, servant leadership calls for “a holistic approach to work, building a sense of community, and a sharing of power” (ibid., 4). As community protectors and stewards, police officers are role models, community leaders, and servants of the greater good.

Law enforcement agencies in today’s society are also limited by their largely pyramidal hierarchical structures, a traditional form of organization that “weakens informal links, dries up channels of honest reaction and feedback, and creates limiting chief subordinate relationships” (Greenleaf 1977, 76). In addition, the bitterness and anger we hold on to in response to police officer assaults and murders holds us back. Spears and Lawrence argue that today’s organizations must transition from this command-and-control structure of organization into a newer type of leadership, “one based



on teamwork and community, one that seeks to involve others in decision making, one strongly based in ethical and caring behavior, and one that is attempting to enhance the personal growth of workers while improving the caring and quality of our institutions” (Spears and Lawrence 2002, 2).

By adopting a servant leadership approach to organizational structure, leadership, and community, the law enforcement profession—our peacekeepers—could have great power to help turn this bloodiest of centuries into a time of peace and healing. As Spears and Lawrence point out, “a particular strength of servant leadership is that it encourages everyone to actively seek opportunities to both serve and lead others, thereby setting up the potential for raising the quality of life throughout society” (Spears and Lawrence 2002, 13).

Greenleaf posits that “the strongest, most productive institution over a long period of time is one in which, other things being equal, there is the largest amount of voluntary action in support of the goals of the institution” (Greenleaf 1998, 51). In the same way, the strongest society is one in which its members voluntarily support the greater good; “caring for persons, the more able and the less able serving each other, is the rock upon which a good society is built” (Greenleaf 1977, 62). Police officers, then, must not only show strength in enforcement of laws, but must also seek to gain voluntary compliance through love, compassion, and caring. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, “I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality” (cited in Ferch 2012, xvii).

Take the many brave and dedicated police officers who patrol the roadways, writing tickets or making arrests in order to keep motorists safe by ensuring that motorists understand the consequences for their choice to endanger themselves and others. Now imagine what our roadways would be like if the police stopped enforcing traffic laws. The goal of speeding enforcement is not to punish those who choose to violate the law, but instead to encourage voluntary compliance through education and deterrence. Many police agencies today have embarked on public education campaigns, working with communities and citizens to instill in them an understanding of the dangers of speeding. This is only one example of many in law enforcement today of a holistic view of service to and with our communities, an example that can and should provide a model for the enforcement of all laws.

Now imagine if fewer officers were killed each year because America’s citizens understood and believed in the service they provided, and *wanted* to keep them safe? Greenleaf criticized the traditional perspective of society’s



laws; “When any action is regulated by law,” he wrote, “the incentive for individual conscience to govern is diminished—unless the law coincides with almost universally held moral standards (Greenleaf 1977, 148). Law enforcement is in a position, through servant leadership, to help heal the rift between society’s conscience and those laws that are necessary for a whole society.

FORGIVENESS

Tutu argues that “we cannot go on nursing grudges even vicariously for those who cannot speak for themselves any longer” (Tutu 1999, 279). In order to build community and have a hopeful future, he says, we must learn to forgive (*ibid.*). In my experience, though, the law enforcement community has a difficult time with this notion of forgiveness. By the very nature of the job that we do in bringing justice to victims and criminals to justice, we are not prone to forgive easily. And when a member of our community is murdered, we feel a collective loss, and that pain carries us forward to try and prevent that evil from happening again, as I did after the murder of my friend Kris. “When a death comes to a family, a kind of fierce grip on that which transcends all of us can sometimes be a potent and unifying force below everything” (Ferch 2012, xxi). At the same time, such loss provides us with an opportunity to become closer to one another, to heal and restore our relationships; “to be alive is to know an ever-present cycle of recovery and loss” (*ibid.*, xxii).

As servant leadership is focused on love and caring for those within an organization—or a society—so must a servant leader accept “that imperfections are part of the human condition” (Spears and Lawrence 2002, 68). A capacity to both ask forgiveness and grant it must be at the heart of such service. As Martin Luther King Jr. wrote, “We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. [The one] who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love” (quoted in Ferch 2012, 7).

ASKING FORGIVENESS

Tutu asserts that when a relationship has been damaged, the only possible way toward the future is through forgiveness; “the truth hurts, but silence kills” (Tutu 1999, 107). Both parties, the wronged and the perpetrator, must be willing to reconcile, and forgiveness asking—a stepping forward and



willingness to humbly look inside oneself—is a first step in this process; forgiveness follows confession (Tutu 1999).

What does it mean to ask forgiveness? If I am asking that law enforcement officers fill their hearts with forgiveness and grace, then I must be willing to first explore my own capacity for forgiveness. Forgiveness is an integral step toward healing a relationship, and I would argue that the relationship between law enforcement and the citizens they are sworn to protect is broken and in need of repair. Forgiveness is not an easy task, but is a way of “declaring our faith in the future” (Tutu 1999, 273), that we can once again be whole again. My own personal story of forgiveness illustrates this point.

I’m not sure I realized the need for a healing in our relationship until I invited my sister over last winter. I was home for the holidays, and my sister found a babysitter for my niece so that we could have time, just the two of us. As we sipped our wine, our conversation started out lighthearted, but quickly moved into more difficult territory. My sister is five years my junior, and our childhood was an interesting one. While the details of our story are deeply personal, what is important is that, when I left home at sixteen years old, I left my eleven year old sister behind, and our relationship suffered. As the older sister, I found myself between my parents and their youngest child, and as a result, I tried to take on a more mature role than perhaps I was ready for. In an attempt to be mentor, I became arrogant, feeling superior in my career and my life, and so closed myself to that which I could have learned from her. While we eventually came to a place where we loved and tolerated each other, bad blood lingered between us.

As we talked on this cold Alaskan winter night, a feeling of deep humility and shame came over me as I verbally acknowledge the harm I had caused my sister and our relationship. I realized how I had externalized the causes for our conflict, either blaming her or blaming our parents. My language changed. I began to tell her my story from my perspective, taking ownership for the first time of the harm I had caused her. There was silence, and there were tears, and there was more wine. I asked for her forgiveness. She nodded, and we hugged. My sister is today one of the people I admire most in this world. I often feel that her wisdom, her perspective of life, and love, and family, is deeper and more real than mine. She grounds me, and supports me, and her friendship is more important to me than most other things in this world.

Forgiveness asking, for me, was an unfolding of brutal truth, a breaking down and rebuilding that was painful, but cleansing. I hadn’t realized that



our relationship needed repairing, but after that night, having finally brought so much out into the open, we began to take a new and better path. As Tutu writes, our forgiveness created a more “robust and resilient relationship” (Tutu 1999, 20). It is true that “forgiveness asks us to love our way through a little bit of messiness” (ibid., 17), but in the end, the future of my relationship with my sister—one of the most important people in my life—is stronger and healthier than it has ever been.

It is in this spirit that I ask other law enforcement officers to open their hearts to the possibility of forgiveness; not in order to forget wrongs that have been done, but to acknowledge them, face them head on, and in doing so become capable of letting go of the bitterness that would otherwise reside in our hearts.

GRANTING FORGIVENESS AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Tutu differentiates retributive justice, “whose chief goal is to be punitive” (Tutu 1999, 54) from restorative justice, in which “the central concern is the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships, a seeking to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator” (ibid., 55). As a law enforcement officer, although I am a part of the “justice system,” I have always felt disconnected from the end result of those actions I take in the field. I arrest someone for a wrong they’ve done, I book them into jail, and sometimes I testify in court. Their fate, though—their future within the penal system—is something I have not spent much time considering. I do my job, and “the system” does its part. If I am to ask Americans to increase their awareness of the battles that police officers face, however, I must also increase my own awareness by facing the realities and failings of the American justice system of which I am a part.

If I am to consider, then, that true justice relating to the enforcement of laws should be restorative rather than retributive, I must factor the longer-term consequences of my police actions into my decision making on the job. It also means that, with forgiveness in my heart, I must never lose sight of the humanity and worth of those I come in contact with, regardless of the wrongs they may have done. As Tutu found during his time on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, “however diabolical the act, it did not turn the perpetrator into a demon” (Tutu 1999, 83). When a police officer fails to respect a person they come in contact with, they not only



dehumanize that person, but they risk dehumanizing themselves; “Anger, resentment, lust for revenge, even success through aggressive competitiveness, are corrosive” (ibid., 31).

In considering forgiveness in the case of a fallen officer, one must ask who the injured party is. In responding to Wiesenthal’s (1998) story of a Nazi soldier asking forgiveness of a Jew for his crimes, several scholars argue that murder cannot be forgiven because the wronged person is no longer able to grant that forgiveness. In any murder, though, are there not other victims? Certainly in the case of a fallen officer, not only the immediate friends and family are harmed, but also his or her coworkers, the community he or she protected, and beyond. Chris Cosgriff, founder of the Officer Down Memorial Page which records and remembers fallen officers each day and throughout history, says that “when a police officer is killed, it’s not an agency that loses an officer, it is an entire nation” (Officer Down Memorial Page 2012). I would argue, then, that there are many people who might be in a position to forgive in this case.

FORGIVING MURDER

Another question that must be asked, however, is even more difficult: Is murder forgivable? The Dalai Lama argues that we should forgive those who have committed even the worst atrocities (Wiesenthal 1998, 129). However, Fox argues that “some sins are too big for forgiveness” (Fox 1998, 145), and Ozick echoes that “murder is irrevocable” and that “there are spots forgiveness cannot wash out” (quoted in Wiesenthal 1998, 215). I am reminded of the story that Tutu tells of the mother of a girl, Suzie, who was murdered in South Africa, and who had forgiveness in her heart for those who committed the murder. The mother wrote that “Anger, hatred, resentment, bitterness, revenge—they are death dealing spirits, and they will ‘take our lives’.... I believe that the only way we can be whole, healthy, happy persons is to learn to forgive” (quoted in Wiesenthal, 1998, 156).

In stark contrast to this mother’s sentiment, I see the posts on social media on a regular basis urging those of us in law enforcement to speak out when a “cop killer” is up for parole. “No parole for cop killers!” the posts exclaim, asking that we write letters and deny their release. Tutu, however, asks us to “condemn the sin while being filled with compassion for the sinner” (Tutu 1999, 83). For what do we gain by hating the man who kills a police officer? For the man with the business card, he has gained nothing,



but lost his identity in the process. Heschel asks whether the issue is even really one of forgiveness, or whether it is instead “how the victims...can live without bitterness and vengeance, without losing their own humanity” (quoted in Wiesenthal 1998, 173).

I believe that the key understanding here is that, as Tutu and his colleagues believed during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission proceedings in South Africa after the fall of apartheid, people do have the ability to change, show remorse, and even reenter society. To believe otherwise would be to dehumanize the perpetrators, and in doing so, dehumanize ourselves. By instead focusing on partnerships between public servants and the communities they police, through educational and outreach efforts, the mutual humanity and health of the community as a whole would be improved.

I want to make two important points here. First, police officers are some of the most honorable, honest, caring people I have ever met. My argument is not that police officers are in the business of dehumanizing people, or that they do not appropriately care for their communities; quite the opposite, police officers have already dedicated their lives to the service of others, even at the expense of their own families and even their own lives. I believe, though, that law enforcement agencies can do more to share these successes with their communities, and to include communities as partners in collaboration for the common good. Second, I believe that while many police agencies are very caring organizations, few of them, in my experience, have wholly adopted a servant leadership way of being. While many leadership scholars acknowledge that there are times—in states of emergency, in states of war—when an authoritarian, top down leadership format is called for, it is becoming clear that “strict command and control leadership is an ‘outmoded, inaccurate, and dangerous model’” (Spears and Lawrence 2002, 269). Retired Lieutenant Colonel Ruby Braye argues that a servant leadership model would be effective in today’s military, and I posit that, by extension, so would it be effective—and necessary—in today’s law enforcement. “Because soldier’s are expected to make the supreme sacrifice—give their lives, if necessary, in defense of the nation and all that we stand for,” she writes, “it has become clear that today’s soldiers are not as willing to blindly follow leaders without question” (ibid.). Braye continues to illuminate the need to become aware of the concerns and pain in the lives of those who are served through acts of love and caring (Spears and Lawrence 2002).



MOVING FORWARD

Franklin Littell writes that one of the keys to achieving a higher level of human interaction is “in the enforcement of law by reliable stewards of public power” (quoted in Wiesenthal 1998, 200). In my experience, anger and resentment at officer deaths is holding the ranks of those public stewards back from their true potential. Consider what might be accomplished if that bitterness were turned toward good? Forgiveness, as Tutu reminds us, does not mean that we forget or make light of the crime done. Instead, it requires that we face those wrongs, but do not dwell on them or let them also bring us down.

On January 1, 2012, Park Ranger Margaret Anderson attempted to stop a man in a vehicle who failed to stop at a chain checkpoint on Mount Rainier, Washington. Before she was even able to get out of her vehicle, Anderson was confronted with a hail of gunfire, one round striking her in the head and killing her. She was the mother of two young children. The man who committed this horrible act subsequently died of exposure as he fled through the snow from the officers who tracked him. As it did in 2002, the National Park Service cried in collective agony when this tragedy occurred. Anderson’s widower and children will be among the survivors at National Police Week in 2013.

I believe that one of the reasons so many police officers are assaulted and murdered is that society has accepted—either through implicit endorsement of such act as we see in music and video games that make light of such violence, or through their silence and lack of outrage—the murder of these servants of public peace. While I agree that “nothing should happen that would let haters or murderers off the hook by assuring them that grace is readily available,” (p. 211) I also believe that, as Kushner argues, we only hurt ourselves by holding onto our resentment of these wrongdoers (Wiesenthal 1998, 186). It is time we as a society agree to protect those who protect us. We must see these murders for what they are, and never forget them, but use the energy and passion they create for good and positive things.

A new initiative called “Below 100” is an example of such action, a program that takes responsibility for many officer deaths upon the officers themselves, focusing on the decision making and mindset that put them into the situations in which they found themselves in danger. Other examples from around the country illustrate the powerful position police agencies



have in bringing about community reconciliation and healing. Examples of this type of “community oriented policing,” in which law enforcement partners with their constituents to gain voluntary compliance, include police officers conducting career fairs for Muslim youth in inner city New York, officers reading to children in Las Vegas classrooms, and officers teaching families about bicycle safety in neighborhoods across the country. It is programs such as these that show the positive and healing nature of love and forgiveness, and the benefits of power sharing.

In the spirit of such positive and hopeful programs as those mentioned above, I invite police leaders to join me in partnering with our communities in order to bridge the growing separation between protectors and protected. Here are a few action items that might begin to move us in that direction:

1. Implement a servant leadership approach both within law enforcement organizations and between these agencies and their constituencies. Be the first to reach out to those who would distrust the police.
2. Empower law enforcement officers to become involved in their communities as servants and friends; practice community oriented policing. Work to eliminate the oversimplified us versus them mentality that separates us.
3. Hold law enforcement officers to a high standard of accountability; ensure that complaints of misconduct are immediately and thoroughly investigated.
4. Encourage awareness of cultural norms within law enforcement agencies. Provide training to officers and police leaders in justice and forgiveness; work to eliminate vengeance as a motivator, instead promoting healing and reconciliation.
5. Never accept that law enforcement deaths are acceptable, that they are to be expected, or that they will always happen. Every officer death hurts not only the law enforcement family, but the communities they serve.

Greenleaf argues that the best test of servant leadership’s effectiveness is whether “those being served grow as persons: do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? *And* what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will she or he benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived?” (Greenleaf 1998, 43). Greenleaf continues to ask, in this test, whether no one will be hurt by the actions a leader or organization takes. He quotes Shakespeare, saying that



true servants are “they that have power to hurt and will do none” (Greenleaf 1977, 56). Police officers are in a position to do either great harm or great good, and thus have potential to become loving servants, moving our society forward to wholeness and health.

CONCLUSION

Kushner writes that “forgiving happens inside us. It represents a letting go of the sense of grievance, and perhaps most importantly a letting go of the role of victim” (in Wiesenthal 1998, 186). If police agencies adopt a servant leadership approach to organization based on “harmony, friendliness, community” (Tutu 1999, 31), setting aside the traditional autocratic, pyramidal form of organization, will not the officers grow and themselves become true servants? If each police officer learns to accept love and forgiveness into his or her heart, will not the culture of law enforcement begin to shift from one of retributive justice toward one of reconciliation and positive action? And if we see that culture shift, will not the citizens of America begin to see law enforcement not as an enemy, but as a healing, unifying force?

Tutu speaks about the idea of *Ubuntu*, the interconnectedness of all humanity. Law enforcement, rather than seeing themselves as tasked with rooting out evil from the populace, should begin to understand their capacity for community building and reconciliation. Through his participation in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Tutu recognized that every human being has the capacity for both good and evil. It is in that spirit that I believe police officers around the country can collaborate with the people of the United States to ensure that violence—not only against officers, but against other citizens as well—becomes socially unacceptable, and thus that these atrocities cease to occur in our society.

Almost every other day, year-round, families of fallen officers gather in churches and fields and gravesides. A flag is folded, crisp edges and points, white gloves and heel taps marking time. Three rifle shots pierce the air, bystanders wincing, jumping ever so slightly with each report. And echoing through trees and from buildings and stained glass, the notes of “Amazing Grace” ring out, the words on the lips of all who can hear: “Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.” As I strive to serve to the best of my ability my community, my society, my world, I ask forgiveness of those I have wronged, and have forgiveness in my heart for those who have wronged. “I once was lost, but now am found. Was blind, but now I see.”



NOTE

1. “End of Watch” refers to the date an officer was killed.

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