

Summons of Joy Program

North County Churches Uniting for Racial Harmony and Justice's "Summons of Joy" Program kicked off its fourth year a couple weeks ago. This program was implemented four years ago as part of a program to improve the relations between the police and the community.

It involves some of our North County Churches Uniting for Racial Harmony and Justice's (NCCU) churches in Florissant donating funds to NCCU s during the Christmas season, and NCCU buys hundred dollar gift certificates. These certificates are then given to the Florissant Police Department to give to individuals they stop during the Christmas season for minor violations. They give the certificates to those who appear to have a financial need rather than give them tickets. The first year we gave the Department 42 one hundred dollar gift certificates, 76 the second year, 98 last year, and 64 this year. Instead of just giving them warnings, they give each one a hundred dollar gift certificate as well. During these years our churches have donated more than \$27,000 to support this Program.

This program began as part of NCCU's effort for the police and the community to work together and build better relations with one another. After the Michael Brown shooting and during the riots in Ferguson, NCCU held a number of community forums in North County and brought together the mayors, police, pastors, and community leaders throughout North County in an effort to help calm the situation down in North County. We even had members of the Alton, Illinois police department and the Madison Sheriff department participate. The Alton Police Department still participates in our work and has even implemented a similar program but on a smaller scale. After we met for a number of times, we decided to form a Committee, "Discussion and Solutions Committee," to work together to explore ways in which we could calm our communities down and improve the relations between the police and the community. Out of this Committee one of our members, Rev. John Higgins, Pastor of John Knox Presbyterian Church in Florissant brought to our attention a similar program that existed in Kansas City. It was a program that helped improve the relations between the police and the community; therefore with the approval of NCCU, we adopted it.

Our Summons of Joy Program has received a warm reception from individuals who receive the gift certificates and the community generally. In fact, many who receive the certificates hug all police officers in sight, others give officers big thank you's, and some even breakdown and sob. The police officers love the program, because they have never received so much positive response from the community. This program is spreading to other parts of the country as well. I shared an article on this program with the President of the Louisville Presbyterian Seminary during an annual meeting of the Presidents Roundtable. He had copies made and shared them with approximately 40 attendees from around the Country who received the information very favorably. I had to answer many questions concerning this program at this meeting. In fact, one of the many pastors present told me that he was going to share this program with the Mayor in his hometown in Alabama and ask him to implement a similar program.

Our Discussion and Solutions Committee consists of four police departments and the St. Louis County Police Department North precinct. The departments include the Florissant, Hazelwood, Clayton, and Alton police departments, three pastors, the Superintendent and the Director of Communications of Hazelwood school district, a representative of Ferguson-Florissant school district, and several community leaders. We have been working to bring the churches, schools, and community together around some positive activities since 2014. We have brought several mediation and reconciliation groups to help us, one from California and the other from St. Louis as well as representatives of the Police and Community Relation Organization from Washington, D.C. to work with us. Based upon our work, we have had several police departments increase their diversity, attend more community events, visit some of our churches, organized athletic leagues for youth, implement coffee with cops programs, participate in school activities, and have begun to communicate with citizens in times other than at times of trouble. Since various organizations and the police have been working together several departments have had their officers undergo police community relations training.

Of course, there is still work to be done, but we have been very pleased with our progress.

Dr. Rance Thomas

Cofounder and President of North County Churches Uniting for Racial Harmony and Justice (NCCU)
(26 Churches of various denomination including seven Catholic Churches)

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