

5 Effective Principles to Minister to First Responders

I remember my time in law enforcement and seeking good, godly counsel in my time of need. One thing I found challenging was finding a pastor who would listen to my concerns, but also someone who understood where I was coming from as a law enforcement officer. This is one of the most difficult hurdles for any minister to overcome in their labor to reach first responders for Christ.

Below I have listed a few suggestions, which come across as elementary, but they are absolute foundational requirements to minister to sheepdogs.

- **Pray:** The first thing any of us should do before embarking on a new mission is pray. Ask God to give you the wisdom and direction to minister to these public servants. Ask Him to guide you and help you be empathetic with them.
- **Be Present:** Call your local sheriff's department or police department and request a meeting with the chief of police or chaplaincy corps if possible. If nothing else, introduce yourself and develop relationships with the officers and leadership. Inquire regarding specific needs they may have and consult with your congregation on ways to meet those needs in a practical manner.
- **Get Involved:** Many agencies offer a ride-along program for their chaplains and even, sometimes, for their citizens. You may be limited to riding for only a few hours during certain times of the day, but it allows you an opportunity to see what goes on behind the badge, not just what you read in headlines.
- **Earn their Trust; Keep It at All Cost:** There is nothing

in this world like earning someone's trust and building authentic relationships. But if you earn the trust of a law enforcement officer, you have earned a marvelous thing. These men and women are the frontline protectors of our communities, and their faith walk is just as important as anyone else. Work to earn their trust and, never betray them.

- **Be Patient and Persistent:** You will not be given the keys to the department, and you may be shunned or ignored by many until you earn their trust. Here's the deal; these men and women deal with the most vile, evil, vicious members of our society daily. Their involvement goes deeper than the headline stories you read about. There will be some who have bad habits; they will use foul language; and there will be some who are vulgar and obscene. You are not walking into a Sunday school class. Be prepared and do not go in with your feelings on your sleeve. But when you are welcomed in to the pack, you will have more influence with them than most anyone else in this world.

One of the most neglected mission fields in America is that of law enforcement and other first responders. There are great programs, but programs do not equal personal relationship. With law enforcement officers, that may be more difficult, but go in with open arms and a heart full of love to share, and in time, you will reap a rich harvest for the kingdom of heaven.
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