

Key to rebuilding trust is revealing the humanity behind both uniforms and front doors

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing October 9, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts in the wake of the George Floyd murder* 

Gadfly again just keeping an eye on what's happening close by. Northampton County has had **2 such summits**, none recently. Would it be a good idea to do something like this locally?

Race, Relations, and Rhetoric Transformation Church LV

Selections from Kayla Dwyer, "It shouldn't be us vs. them': Lehigh County police, communities of color both feel pain, have to work together for same goal, panel says."

The colors black and blue have come to represent division in the national conversation around race and police brutality. In a Lehigh County town hall Tuesday night, panelists considered the colors in a different way: bruising.

As four local police chiefs and four community leaders of color put it during the livestreamed panel Black and Blue: Race, Relations, and Rhetoric, the bruising is felt by both law enforcement and the communities they serve, and improving relations between the two are an essential step to healing.

"It shouldn't be us versus them," South Whitehall Township police Chief Glen Dorney said. "We all have the same goal."

But trust has been broken, not just with recent events but through hundreds of years of systemic problems, said Michael Comick, a prison chaplain and a mentor with the Allentown youth program Midnight Basketball. "And it needs to be rebuilt one life at a time."

The eight panelists are part of a larger working group that came together on the heels of the unrest following the death of Minneapolis resident

George Floyd at the hands of police, which prompted a national racial reckoning. Local police chiefs reached out to community stakeholders to have conversations about policing in the county, and the group has met once a month for the last four months, Dorney said.

Its approximately 30 members represent a diverse cohort, including Black, Hispanic and religious communities, students and law enforcement, Olmeda said.

Similar efforts are underway in Northampton County, where leaders in law enforcement and communities of color have [held two “listening summits”](#) on issues surrounding community policing and reform, with the goal of finding ways to improve the relationship between police and communities of color. At the second summit in August, District Attorney Terry Houck said the conversation would continue in smaller groups.

Key to rebuilding trust, panelists said, is finding ways to reveal the humanity behind both uniforms and front doors. Comick said the children he mentors see police in a different way once they get to know and talk to them. But they’re conditioned by hundreds of years of systemic racism to feel nervous around police as the default.

“They’re human just like we are,” Comick said. “There’s bad on both sides of the fence. But the good on both sides of the fence must work together.”

Part of working together, like during the meetings of the working group, has meant uncomfortable confrontations. Mayfield said he challenged members of law enforcement in the group with recognizing systemic problems and taking their opportunity to make changes.