

“the perfect opportunity to ask bigger and deeper questions”

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing, Police June 24, 2020

🦋 *Latest in a series of posts about the Bethlehem Police* 🦋

Good article by Nate Jastrzemski in the print version of the *Bethlehem Press* this morning, and good not just because he found in **ouroboros** the absolutely perfect image for our life these days. Most days it simply feels like we are eating our own tails, doesn't it? Gadfly couldn't find Nate's article online, so he typed most of it here for you.

The image of Bethlehem as “sitting quietly amid the tumult,” a Bethlehem “quiet and lucky,” a Bethlehem “fairly peaceful” evokes Gadfly's fantasy image of beneficent and caring small town police/community relations in our town captured in Norman Rockwell's iconic “Runaway” painting. The way Gadfly would like to see it.

But “would it take only one incident [here] to light the fire?” Frankly, that's what's been on Gadfly's mind as he recently wrote about what he will call for shorthand the “Hayes St. case,” the traffic stop of the Hispanic man.

from Nate Jastrzemski, A balance is needed: law enforcement and healthy living.” Bethlehem Press (print edition), June 24, 2020.



We now live in a world of pandemic and protests.

Together, they are an ouroboros of social anxiety, a circular inflammation of pain and loss, feeding each other and off each other. While we strive to keep ourselves healthy, the police work to keep us safe. But from what threats?

Worldwide protests demanding massive reforms in legislation and the daily practicalities of justice and law enforcement demand we ask bigger questions, and we fact is we are fairly helpless against the coronavirus,

but over-reactive and violent policing is a manageable human, institutional failing.

Sitting quietly amid the tumult of neighboring East Coast metropolises, the Lehigh Valley, and Bethlehem in particular, has been blessed with small, peaceful demonstrations calling for reforms and solidarity. They have not been inflamed by bitter memories and pain from a local history of civilian deaths at the hands of police officers. But would it take only one incident to light the fire?

While supportive and appropriate [statements by the Mayor and the Chief], these messages did not address deeper systemic parts of our national conversation. They speak — importantly — of overcoming bigotry, but they do not speak of structural racism; of unequal housing, healthcare, employment and education and a national preference for spending on police departments over social programs.

When questioned about the feasibility or efficacy of defunding police — which does not mean eliminating them, but reallocation some of their resources toward other programs — no one [Mayor, Chief] answered. . . .

In fact, inquiries on this subject to police, administration official and several city council members, including President Adam Waldron, resulted in only a single response.

Councilwoman Olga Negron . . . likewise remained silent on the matter of defunding, but said of the Justice Policing Reform Act of 2020, “I’m so proud of our Senator Casey for joining the brave ones in the senate. It’s time for reform; it’s time to reflect, to speak up and change. Enough is enough. . . . It’s very clear that it took a **BPD deadly raid** to create change [in] the department, but that is far from saying we have a squeaky clean department. . . . Training is important, but it’s not the only thing that matters. Diversifying the police is a must, and community policing should be the number one priority of every police department. Creating transparency and accountability is something easily said but not easily done. The fact that we have police body cameras as well as cameras on police cars is a good start, but what’s done with the footage is when the transparency and accountability really comes in.”

{The initiative by Councilpeople Reynolds and Crampsie Smith] may be the perfect opportunity to ask bigger and deeper questions.

As parts of our country cry out for justice and equality in televised bouts of demonstrators versus heavily armed police, Bethlehem is quiet and lucky. Perhaps now is a time for introspection, to analyze what other, less fortunate cities are doing correctly or incorrectly. Should we analyze the cultural, legislative or financial options of the police department before we join the daily headlines?

Bethlehem remains a fairly peaceful community, with little crime, despite our increasing use as a national delivery hub and waves of millions of visitors — in less fraught years. But with jobs down, businesses closing and people trapped at home for months on end, frustrations are high. Friction can start a fire.

City leaders agree we need to work together, but do they believe anything needs to change?