



# Perris News

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## Perris' Cops and Clergy Group

Pastors and police say that Perris' Cops and Clergy group is all about understanding and raising the level of awareness between the community and law enforcement.

The group, which meets once a month at Perris Police Headquarters, includes 35 ministers from the Perris Valley who get the latest police information from Chief James McElvain and let law enforcement officers know the issues that are on the minds of their congregation and fellow residents. Many of the clergy take part in Perris City events and also appear at Chamber of Commerce and Rotary meetings.

During a typical gathering, ministers and police might receive an update on the state budget situation from a county supervisor, listen to a presentation about how to deal with anger management issues or spread the word about a faith-based ministry helping people by making available low-cost food boxes.

Perris City Councilwoman Rita Rogers helped start the Perris group and presides over monthly meetings.

"We have definitely improved the communications between police and the community," Rogers said. "We are making a difference. We are bridging the community."

Rogers said that when several pastors expressed concern about officer-involved shootings. So Perris police arranged a visit to the shooting range and went through a simulator that required them to make split-second decisions about whether or not to pull the trigger.

Later, the clergy spoke to District Attorney representatives and internal affairs officers who investigate police shootings and also visited the morgue to speak to coroner's officials about their forensics-gathering techniques.

Rogers said the experience helped ministers learn the difficult decisions law officers must make almost daily and fostered a new appreciation for their service.

When concerns arose about the number of parolees being released in Perris, clergy swung into action, creating an "Adopt a Parolee" program. That effort helped put parolees in touch with job placement and counseling services, Rogers said.

Riverside County Supervisor Marion Ashley praised the group when he addressed their February meeting.

"I'm proud of the contributions the churches have made," Ashley said. "I congratulate you on the important work you do."

Ashley said churches should expect to receive more request from the public for food, clothing and utility assistance in the next 18 months until the economy turns around.

McElvain said he's missed just one or two Cops and Clergy meetings since he became chief four years ago.

"Misunderstandings develop from miscommunications," he said. "These meetings give us the chance to show people who we are and where we're heading at this police station. It's another opportunity to build relationships and you learn the value of having those relationships. Ministers go back to their congregations and bridge the gap even further."

Pastor Ted Norton, of New Life Fellowship of Perris, said he always comes back from Cops and Clergy meetings with lots of information for his congregation.

"You feel more comfortable about the community when you know the people who help run the community," he said.

Cops and Clergy meetings are held at 6 p.m. on the second Monday of each month and are open to the public.



Perris City Councilwoman Rita Rogers, Riverside County Supervisor Marion Ashley and Perris Police Chief James McElvain make notes during this week's meeting of the Cops and Clergy community group.



Tonya Grimsley explains a faith-based food distribution program while ministers listen. Grimsley, who works for Angel Food Ministries in Temecula, spoke at the Cops and Clergy gathering.

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