

Testimony of

Reverend James Summey

September 10, 2008

Honorable Judiciary Committee Members,

When I became pastor of the English Road Baptist Church in May of 1992, I knew part of the history of this community of approximately 1400 hundred people located in the West End area of High Point, North Carolina. As a child a grew up on a small farm no more than fifteen miles away from the West End and heard stories in the late fifties and sixties of the pool halls and the beer joints of this infamous area.

The West End Community, for most of the 20th century had been a blue collar area of town. West End neighbors labored in the nearby cotton/hosiery mills and worked in the many furniture factories (rightly so for High Point s noted as the furniture capitol of the world). People worked, worshipped and recreated in this area as this little niche of town had most of the amenities that people needed years ago.

With changes that began in the mid and late seventies in the hosiery and furniture markets, there was some slow down in manufacturing. Also, many of the folks who had labored in those jobs now were nearing retirement and fewer workers were devoted to the trades of the area. Private or company owned housing of the West End began to be sold as investment property and by the eighties the area had become a neighborhood of renters with fewer home owners or seekers of such housing. A once fairly stable community became more transitional. A since of "not knowing the neighbors" developed, as did more distance in relationships and lack of camaraderie took place. Crime rates began to rise a bit and the once "friendly fights" became more intense. Then, in the late eighties, the advent of crack cocaine found a "home" in this part of town and the sales of such along with all the vices of prostitution, violence, intimidation, neighborhood suppression, and a general sense of unrest developed.

Into the nineties the West End became a place where the residents lived in fear and in a "lock-down" mentality. Gun fire rang out much too frequently. Street robberies and muggings of every nature were every day events. Prostitution was so rampant that on one Sunday morning in 1997 there were so many prostitutes walking the sidewalks around the church area that church attendees could not turn into the parking lot for the "Johns" picking up the girls. Calls to the police resulted in frustration for me, West End residents, and even the police. Race relations decreased due to the high number of African

American young men involved in the drug dealing and the crimes creating distrust between them and other race groups.

The police utilized every traditional method of policing and deterrence available. Drug raids, drug sweeps, prostitution stings, and round-ups were classically utilized. Yet, so very often the results were so short lived, only to see every crack-house, the street corners, and most of the girls back in business within one to two weeks. Citizens complained, tempers flared, and frustration ran amuck creating a very unhealthy community.

In 1999 three of the West End Church pastors began to meet and discuss the problems of the area. All three (myself included) shared the same concerns and frustrations. We decided to include other members from the three churches (a Reform UCC church, a Methodist church, and a Baptist Church) to meet monthly and discuss how we could work together to have positive impact on the community. We formed a separate non-profit called West End Ministries, Inc. We shared our plight with the City of High Point's Community Development Department. We were encouraged to talk with community residents and have a community meeting. The first meeting yielded 117 residents who came together where we identified three outstanding areas of concern: 1. Crime/Violence; 2. Youth Concerns (wandering and no after school guidance) and 3. Neighborhood appearance and unhealthy housing/living conditions.

Each church took an area of concern: Rankin Methodist Church addressed youth concerns and opened their doors to host a neighborhood Boys and Girls Club; First Reformed Church took on neighborhood appearance, organized meeting with city inspectors, pushed community clean-up days, made housing ordinances aware to rent lords and pushed for improvements and opened a Thrift Store to provide basic human living necessities at little to no cost. The English Road Baptist Church hosted police and community meetings, urged neighborhood watch programs, worked with language groups to communicate that the police were concerned about their safety, not their green card status. The Baptist Church also started a food ministry and soup kitchen and began feeding the struggling and homeless.

All the above work of the community and the churches helped, but the violence and the drug market activities still prevailed and the community was still fettered by the conditions of lawlessness. Chief Jim Fealy became High Point's new chief of police in January of 2003. The first community meeting that Chief Fealy attended was in the West End. Jim Fealy appeared genuine, caring, professional, competent, and open. I told chief Fealy after the meeting that I appreciate his words, but frankly, I, and many of this community had lost faith in the H.P. Police Department to do anything lasting about our problems. Jim Fealy took my words as a challenge.

A year later I was asked to come to a meeting and to just sit and listen. Myself, a few citizens, many city leaders, and police administration heard a, then, Harvard Associate professor talk about some ideas he had about neighborhood drug markets, how they worked, what drove them and how to "undo" them;

his name... David Kennedy. David Kennedy articulated my frustration. David communicated in words of reality and with facts and real life observations and with a sociological understanding of the dynamics of communities disrupted by violence associated with drug markets. He shared about the police being honest, supporting the constitution, doing less harm, building relationships with the community, recreating an atmosphere where citizens and police could truly dialogue and do so to learn, not to argue. David talked about the police truly identifying the real perpetrators of the violence and the drug markets and then ask them, (not TELL them), ask them to come to a meeting where the community could tell them that their actions were not acceptable and would no longer be tolerated and that they (the community) supported the police. The community would then give the "called in violent and drug marketing offenders" an ultimatum, "Stop the violence and the drug market and tell us you want to turn your life in a positive direction and we will do all that we can to help you. But, if you continue, we will do all that we can to make sure that you face arrest and the court system." I was asked after this meeting what I thought and I simply said, "It makes sense, it can work." I highly credit Chief Fealy, his command staff and all the High Point Police Department for being bold enough and committed to exploring every avenue to develop a way to help the citizens of High Point live in a better and safer environment. And, I am so grateful to David Kennedy for developing this "way" of approaching crime and violence and staying with his message till someone was willing to implement it.

This new way of approaching crime is interactive with the community and with the criminal elements within communities. This "method" is redeeming and thus is viewed as fair because it utilizes truth and accuracy as tools to pinpoint problem individuals and then, still, gives them a chance to consider how their lives can be different. The community embraces this way of policing because it gives the community a voice and it gives the criminal element a first hand reality check that all along what they thought was approval was only fear, and now the fear is gone and the truth is known. The community embraces this way of policing because everyone works for the good of people who are struggling with lives of criminality and, then, if those who are given "second chances" continue to live lawless, then the community supports incarceration.

May 18th 2004 was the "call-in" day for the West End Drug Initiative. The offenders had been identified and notified by police, area clergy, and citizens that they (the offenders) could come to this meeting with no reprisals, just come and listen. As nine people came to this meeting and heard the messages of the community and the police, a great sense of positive empowerment came over the community and the police who were involved that night. On May 19th, 2004 (the next day), West End was quiet. No one sold drugs on the corner. No one ran from a house to the street thirty times a day to do curb service drug delivery; not even one prostitute was seen. No gun shots rang out. There was no yelling and fighting and intimidating congregations of people walking down the middle of the street blocking traffic; a new day had arrived.

One month following the event of May 18, 2004, English Road Baptist Church held its annual summer Vacation Bible School which is a children and youth based event for spiritual enrichment. In the eleven years prior to 2004 we had attendance of between 100 and 130 children; however the most that had

ever attended the event from the actual West End Community was 6 kids. Just one month after the call-in of May 18, we had 36 neighborhood children in attendance (the most ever). Overhearing two of the children conversing after one of the sessions that week; one said to another, "Did you walk here?" (The other responded "yes"), followed by "Yeah, we walked too; mama said its ok now." This was just one month after the initiative.

This "new day" still thrives in the West End. Whereas, we led the City of High Point in murders for ten years, there has not been a murder in West End in over four years. New homes are being built. People walk to the stores to purchase goods. Kids walk to church and people sit on their porches and swing in backyard swings. People are planting flower beds and tending them. There is a sense of relief that has lasted because people who were once strangers due to fear and not being able to trust or know each other, now talk, meet on the sidewalks, go to neighborhood meetings, and are working to maintain relationships with law enforcement. Racial relationships have improved very much. Purpose, camaraderie and commitment to causes greater than our differences have filled the voids left by distrust.

The neighborhood sees itself more as a real community, taking on issues other than the violence that once so permeated the streets. Quality of life issues are concerns now because they are also, now, possibilities. Maintenance of the West End and three other areas of high Point where this initiative has been successful is due to continual community and police involvement and an organization in High Point known as the High Point Community Against Violence (a non-profit in its eleventh year). The HPCAV is an organization that works with the police as a multifaceted community voice of addressing acts of violence and sending out positive messages to "Stop the violence." Supporting members of HPCAV, regular citizens, community leaders, elected officials, the police, and community groups are all seeing the value of communicating the message of reaching those in the community who have chosen paths of violence to be a way of life and, now, offering them a positive direction. With this method of policing, involving the community, everyone has a choice to see what life truly can be. This way is a way that brings out the very best of people because it is people living and doing their best to help each other.

Jim Summey