

## Why should Christians care about police accountability?

Thorough and proficient law enforcement is essential, and service as a police officer requires capacities for judgment and courage that deserve the respect and gratitude of all citizens. But those granted law enforcement power are called to be exemplary in their obedience to the law and its purpose.

There is convincing evidence that police power is abused in metropolitan Chicago, in relation to people of color.

Reputed victims and their advocates, including members of Christian congregations and pastors working with city youth, and the support given to these testimonies through independent studies, document prevalent police misconduct.

Unlawful and debasing police conduct promotes a culture of fear and alienation, encourages disrespect for the law and law enforcement, incites violence, and magnifies the problem of creating a city that serves and is served by all of its citizens. This abuse of power cannot be separated from a larger web of offenses in the system through which the law is administered, including its judicial and penal institutions. For many citizens, however, the police are the immediate point of contact with this system, and public attention to police accountability is imperative.

## Protestants for the Common Good

*"People of faith advancing justice in public life."*

### Mission Statement

Affirming that God's grace and all-inclusive love call us to advance justice in the public order, Protestants for the Common Good teaches the theological importance of politics as an act of Christian witness, provides resources for Christians to relate their faith to current public policies, and engages in political action that fosters a community of inclusion, equality, and love and mobilizes people of faith for the common good.

# Principles for Promoting Police Accountability



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As Christians, we believe that God's love is all-embracing and God wills an inclusive community of justice and peace. All people are created to live in free and loving response to God by loving one another and by pursuing the common good. Throughout history, Christians have proclaimed that the civil law is an instrument of the divine purpose protecting individuals from harm and securing justice. In our cities and our larger communities today, we are called to provide and promote access for each individual to the conditions that foster freedom, self-respect, and human achievement and thus make possible her or his greater contribution to the community.

Our laws are just when they serve this common good. In the history of our democracy, Christians have often protested against laws that are unjust because they discriminate on the basis of race or poverty. We are no less required to protest against law enforcement when it is unlawful or unjustified.

Police misconduct is openly or silently sanctioned by many in our metropolises who expressly or tacitly believe that "law and order" takes precedence over "law and justice" in the public purpose. Focused on the safety of their persons and property, they are willing to keep other purposes subservient to the war on crime. Hence, the unlawful and debasing practices of law enforcement agents in poor and minority

communities are approved or ignored so long as these practices are perceived to control crime, and this acceptance is supported by television and other cultural expressions that celebrate tough and violent police. We, the members of Protestants for the Common Good, confess our complicity in this consent to and perpetuation of abuse by the police. The elevation of "order" over a just order is an idolatrous conception of our common life, a religious misconception of the human community that violates the common good and, therefore, the divine purpose.

**Protestants for the Common Good proposes the following as commitments required to help ensure justice and accountability in law enforcement:**

*Police, elected officials, and the general public should acknowledge the widespread misuse of police power and proclaim unequivocally in speech and deed that abuse will not be tolerated. Police misconduct must stop.*

Members of the larger public should reflect on their own complicity, by omission or commission, in promoting or permitting police misconduct.

*Congregations and other associations should provide public opportunities for individuals who perceive that they have been abused and groups who describe themselves as "targeted" by the police to articulate their complaints and their concerns free from fear of retaliation.*

Religious congregations both within and without aggrieved areas can create forums for testimonies

and, in doing so, congregations outside especially abused communities can as requested support those within such communities.

*Reliable information on crime in the city and on the activities of the police, including the character and disposition of complaints against the police, should be assembled and disseminated in a manner accessible to metropolitan public attention and deliberation.*

As part of cultivating public discussion of this issue, community leaders and scholars who can help congregations and other local groups interpret and discuss the information can be identified, recruited and offered as consultants

*An independent citizens group, with which the City of Chicago should cooperate, should be constituted to review the procedures of recruitment, training and accountability within the police department, as well as the department's procedures for communication with the public, and to make recommendations for change.*

In the constitution of this group, especially abused communities should be properly represented.