

**Small Talk – April 12 2021**  
**Required Facial Covering When in Public – Day 262**  
**By Michael Small**

All those who seek to hold standing (authorized and ordained ministers) in the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ (UCC) go through a rigorous process of examination. This is after no less than three-to-four-years of seminary, and four-years of college. As a “member in discernment” a candidate for ministry meets numerous times with the Committee on Ministry, goes through a significant psychological and emotional examination at the beginning of the three-to-four-year educational cycle and at the end before being approved for the process of ordination/authorization for ministry. Why this long and tedious process. The wider church wants to be certain that those who serve the church are safe for those whom they serve. The process is not perfect, but because of a checkered history of abuse and misbehavior by clergy, the UCC will continue to carefully examine those who seek to serve in the church. The wider church wants to know that all of those who are authorized for ministry in the UCC are fit to, in part, “Serve and Protect”. It is absolutely the right thing to do! As a clergy who holds standing, I continue to participate in continuing education, boundary training, and seek to be self-aware of my strengths and areas of needed growth. (For those who wish to read the UCC Ordained Ministers Code go to the link below<sup>1</sup>)

“Serve and Protect” is the mission statement of many of our law enforcement agencies. It is simple and understandable – when placing the badge on, when beginning their workday, it is every law enforcement persons mission to move into the day to “Serve and Protect”. As they work to “Serve and Protect” they also know that they may be placed in life-threatening positions. They don’t know if this might be the day when they are threatened or tragically threatened, harmed, or killed. I have written before about the officers, deputies, and staff of the Cass County Sheriff’s Office and how I among many serve as a Cass County Sherriff’s Chaplain. The residents of Cass County are largely blest to have these men and women who have pledged to “Protect and Serve”.

I wake up this morning to the news that a young twenty-year-old black man, pulled over for a traffic violation, is shot and killed by a Brooklyn Park policeman on a spring, Sunday afternoon in Minnesota. In a tinder-dry emotional setting in the Twin Cities, the nation, and the world – anger spills out into the streets. Once again, the National Guard is called out. And I say to myself – “when will we ever learn”. This morning, I also see police officers bodycam recently released from December 2020 in Windsor Virginia. With guns drawn, threatening a Black/Latino Army Lieutenant, who is in uniform, for an alleged traffic violation. Hands out the window, Lt. Nazario says “I’m honestly afraid to get out [of the car]”. The officer responds “Yeah, you should be.” “When will we ever learn!”

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ucc.org/what-we-do/justice-local-church-ministries/local-church/mesa-ministerial-excellence-support-and-authorization/ministers/ministers\\_ordained-ministers-code/](https://www.ucc.org/what-we-do/justice-local-church-ministries/local-church/mesa-ministerial-excellence-support-and-authorization/ministers/ministers_ordained-ministers-code/).

I write this knowing that the vast majority of police and law enforcement people are good and upstanding citizens. They are dedicated to “Protect and Serve”. They do their jobs at the highest degree of honor, respect, and integrity. The majority have never had to fire a weapon at another person. Whether it is the Capitol Police, State Police, or Local Law Enforcement – every year too many of them are wounded or killed in the line of duty. No one, NO ONE should have to die.

I also know the list of far too many young black men who have died as a result of the inappropriate and unnecessary use of deadly force by those who are called to “Serve and Protect”. It has to stop. In law enforcement, in work settings, in families, in relationships, in everyday activities – we must find ways to STOP THE VIOLENCE done unto others – loved ones and strangers. We must find new paths to resolving conflict and deescalating potentially dangerous situations. Use our voices, gently rather than yelling. Listen to one another. Be reasonable.

Let us seek to walk along side, to be the “better angels” and have the courage to challenge and change systems that are corrupted and tarnished by the violence of a few. We can solve this – it will take persistence, courage, reflection, a willingness to learn and change, and it will take time.

It is time!

In the spirit and agape love of Jesus, Michael

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