



*United States Marshals Service
Office of Congressional Affairs*



Fugitive Safe Surrender:
A Community Re-entry Program for Non-Violent Offenders

On August 8, 2005, Pete Elliott, United States Marshal for the Northern District of Ohio, announced the results of the first United States Marshals Service-sponsored *Fugitive Safe Surrender* initiative. From August 3-6, 2005, more than 800 people in trouble with the law - 324 with outstanding felony warrants - voluntarily surrendered during to an unprecedented coalition of faith-based, non-profit, law enforcement, and judicial authorities at Mount Sinai Baptist Church in Cleveland, Ohio.

“It’s a paradigm shift,” said Dr. C. Jay Matthews, Mount Sinai’s Senior Pastor and leader of Fugitive Safe Surrender, a faith-based pilot program targeted at Cleveland’s 4th Police District and believed to be the first-of-its-kind in the nation. “We’ve proven that community partnerships can successfully encourage felony fugitives to voluntarily and peacefully surrender – in huge numbers. We’ve protected our neighborhoods, kept our law enforcement officers from danger, silenced the naysayers, and given those who surrendered the opportunity to turn their lives around.”

Beginning in July 2004, a coalition of faith-based, judicial, law enforcement, non-profit, and media leaders assembled in Cleveland to pursue a challenging mission: to reduce the risk to neighborhoods in which fugitives hide, law enforcement officers who pursue fugitives, and fugitives themselves. The result was Fugitive Safe Surrender: a four-day event at Mount Sinai Baptist Church in which the Cuyahoga County’s Sheriff’s Office, Prosecuting Attorney’s Office, Common Pleas Court, Public Defender’s Office, Regional Information System, and Clerk of Courts teamed to technologically outfit, staff, and open a community courthouse in the church. The United States Marshals Service, which generated the idea, also provided assistance, as did the Ohio Attorney General’s Office, the district’s U.S. Attorney’s Office, Cleveland Police Department, Cleveland Municipal Court, and suburban municipal courts across the county.

“This effort demonstrates the courage of our justice system’s leaders to try new approaches and team with non-traditional partners,” said Dr. Matthews. “Our coalition’s vision was clear and our planning was excellent, but none of us knew for certain if people would turn themselves in – especially those wanted for felony crimes. We planned, we prayed, and we paid careful attention to detail – and our efforts were rewarded.”

Preliminary results showed that 842 persons surrendered over the program’s four days, from August 3 through August 6, and that 324 of those persons were wanted for felony crimes.

The majority of the felony fugitives who surrendered were wanted in connection with non-violent crimes; however, a number of individuals charged with rape, felonious assault, burglary and robbery – as well as high-level drug offenses - surrendered as well. Non-violent felons were given bond, new court dates and released directly from the church, while those wanted for violent crimes – or those with violent records – were taken into custody.

DC Strategic Partners, LLC assisted the program with coalition and protocol development, volunteer recruitment and management of the media outreach and community engagement that preceded the four-day event. More than 70 volunteers from the congregation at Mount Sinai Baptist Church partnered with justice system officials in the planning, passing out more than 3,000 handbills across Cleveland's 4th Police District, and registering the more than 800 persons who surrendered. WKYC-TV Channel 3, Clear Channel Radio and Radio One provided news coverage and public service announcement airtime, and Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry's Community Re-Entry lent experienced staff, resources and expertise to the cause. Large banners were created and posted in the county and federal courthouses as well as outside the church, a toll-free hotline was established and staffed by deputy sheriffs and assistant prosecutors for fugitives to call with questions, and 2,000 mailers explaining the program were sent to the last known addresses of fugitives in the 4th District.

“My new law enforcement partners told me that a four-day fugitive sweep across our area with 100 officers would typically result in 40 felony arrests,” said Dr. Matthews. “We had eight times that many people wanted for felony crimes turn themselves in peacefully – with no danger to our neighborhoods, the officers or the fugitives themselves. With these results, I’m confident that Fugitive Safe Surrender didn’t end on August 6. It’s just beginning.”

On October 17, 2005, Marshals Service Director John F. Clark directed the USMS Investigative Services Division to prepare for additional Fugitive Safe Surrender opportunities in selected cities across the nation. Over the next several months, the Marshals Service plans to undertake Fugitive Safe Surrender programs similar to the successful Cleveland initiative in the following cities: Akron, Ohio; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Camden, New Jersey; Indianapolis, Indiana; Louisville, Kentucky; Phoenix, Arizona; Richmond, Virginia; and Washington, D.C.

For more information about Fugitive Safe Surrender or the United States Marshals Service's fugitive apprehension mission, please contact the Office of Congressional Affairs at (202) 307-9220.