

# National Faith & Blue Weekend

## Voiceover

00:00

Welcome to *The Beat*—a podcast series from the COPS Office at the Department of Justice. Featuring interviews with experts from a varied field of disciplines, *The Beat* provides law enforcement with the latest developments and trending topics in community policing.

## Jennifer Donelan

00:16

Hello, I'm Jennifer Donelan, and welcome to *The Beat*. Just about everyone in the law enforcement community has heard about National Night Out or Coffee with a Cop; however, there's another annual event that has developed into a huge national following and offers even more unique opportunity for law enforcement and communities to come together for the purpose of celebrating each other, serving their community, or having much needed discussions. National Faith & Blue Weekend is held each Columbus Day holiday weekend throughout the country and has quickly become recognized by law enforcement, local houses of worship, and communities as an opportunity to improve collaboration, increase understanding, and to serve the broader community together.

Our guest today is Reverend Markel Hutchins, the Chairman and CEO of Movement Forward, the human and civil rights organization that spearheads the National Faith & Blue Weekend each year. Reverend Hutchins, welcome to *The Beat*.

## Reverend Markel Hutchins

01:14

Thank you. It's good to be with you.

## Donelan

01:16

And we really want to thank you because I know you're out on the road traveling right now and you're calling in to spend some time with us. So, thank you so much for joining us from the road.

## Hutchins

01:25

Absolutely. We're traveling extensively, meeting with law enforcement agencies and organizations from coast to coast, getting ready for Faith & Blue Weekend 2022 and we're really excited about it, and really excited about this conversation.

## Donelan

01:37

You are out there doing the work. So I'm so excited to tell people about this, especially those who have not heard about Faith & Blue Weekend, and especially even for those who have, making sure that they understand truly what this tool can be used for in terms of community relations. And quite frankly, that

is one of the number one priorities for law enforcement across the country and has been—how do we improve relations with the community? So, let's get started. Can you introduce the audience to Movement Forward first?

## **Hutchins**

*02:08*

Movement Forward is a solution-focused human and civil rights organization. We're based in Atlanta, Georgia. Jennifer, I had an opportunity in my teenage years of being mentored by most of the civil rights icons that worked very closely with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., including his wife, Mrs. Coretta Scott King and Andrew Young, Joseph Lowry, Hosea Williams, John Lewis, Jesse Jackson, and the list goes on and on.

So, I come out of that tradition of civil rights leadership that seeks to actually find solutions to the challenges that we face. And several years ago, I knew that as that generation of leadership was leaving off the scene, they were going to their eternal resting place, that there needed to be a new generation of leaders who were of that ilk, not just interested in marching and protesting, but utilizing those tools, but more importantly, bringing forth thoughts and ideas and efforts to actually solve the problems that we face as a country when it comes to the continuation of the struggle for human and civil rights. And that is the impetus behind which we created Movement Forward.

## **Donelan**

*03:13*

That's wonderful. And so, then Movement Forward leads you to the National Faith & Blue Weekend. So, what inspired that? What's the background on that?

## **Hutchins**

*03:24*

So, there is no more important or high-profile issue around social justice and civil and human rights in this moment in time than issues around law enforcement, particularly police-involved controversies. So, in the late part of 2019, the early part of 2020, I began to be very concerned when I started to see a lot of the protests and demonstrations in the aftermath of some of the law enforcement-involved tragedies that clearly should not have happened. But when I saw some of those protests and demonstrations take a violent or an ill turn, I began to really contemplate what we could do to provide leadership in the civil rights context around these issues that actually brought about solutions and actually brought about transformation and brought communities and law enforcement closer together.

So in April of 2020, I asked the COPS Office at the U.S. Department of Justice to work with our organization and convene a meeting of all of the nation's top national law enforcement organizations—the Fraternal Order of Police, the IACP, Major Cities Chiefs, National Sheriffs, Major County Sheriffs, et cetera—and all of those organizations came together at our invitation to contemplate what we could do to facilitate a movement across this country of unity and collaboration to actually allow communities and law enforcement to come together at tables of sisterhood and brotherhood, if you will, have conversations and actually put solutions on the table.

## Donelan

04:58

National Faith & Blue Weekend is really unique in the sense that we've got 18,000 law enforcement agencies. Many of those agencies host the same type of event, Coffee with a Cop or National Night Out, community meetings, et cetera, but they tend to be sort of cookie cutter. And what you can see with these, is that it's the same people who show up over and over again, right? So, you're talking to that same group and really unable to reach the larger community. So how many National Faith & Blue events do you hold, and what makes them different? What type of events are we talking about?

## Hutchins

05:30

Faith & Blue is different than some of the other events like National Night Out and Coffee with a Cop, which we certainly support, but Faith & Blue is different in that it allows for the law enforcement agencies and the community to dig deeper than just social engagement and Faith & Blue Weekend is over the course of a long weekend so that more people can participate.

Essentially, what we did was we took the best of National Night Out, the best of Coffee with a Cop, and some of the other smaller police community-outreach projects. We took the best of those premises and the principles behind them, combined them with 21st century policing principles, extended that over the course of a long four-day weekend so that more people could participate, and gave it a real mission. Not just to get to have coffee with each other, or have some social engagement during the week, which is how some of these other programs are structured, but being able to have real conversations to tackle difficult subject matters over the course of a long weekend, again, so that more people could participate. And we put them in the hands of the most powerful and influential community assets that this nation has, and that is the faith community.

There are more faith-based organizations in America than any other kind of volunteer or community-based organizations. So, while Faith & Blue is not religious or sectarian at all, we are not focused on religion. It's not about religion. There are 350,000 faith-based organizations in this country. Some 65 million Americans participate in some form of a faith-based service every week. So when you look at the institutions or the entities that have the power to be bridge builders, to be goodwill ambassadors, to be promoters and implementers of action steps that actually decrease the tensions, decrease the mutual bias, and decrease crime and violence—faith-based organizations come to the very top.

So, Faith & Blue Weekend gives an opportunity for every law enforcement agency and every community to come together and actually put on the table or put, or implement, solutions to the unique challenges that face those communities. In the first year of Faith & Blue Weekend, even during the midst of the pandemic, even during the midst of the outcry after the death of George Floyd, we were able to facilitate, in the first year, more than 1,000 events across 43 states and that was with four months of planning.

In 2021, in addition to our collaboration with all the national law enforcement organizations, we partnered together with police chiefs and sheriffs' associations in 44 of the 50 states. And there were 2,000 plus engagements across all 50 states. So, within a very short timeframe, National Faith & Blue Weekend has become the largest and most consolidated police-community outreach project in American history. And I don't think that's a testament to anything but the fact that law enforcement and communities are both hungry for some actual solutions. People are tired of crime and violence escalating. They're tired of controversies from George Floyd and Breonna Taylor to the Uvalde, Texas, tragedy to the numerous assaults and attacks on our law enforcement professionals. We are tired of this kind of division and discord. Folks are ready to collaborate. They're ready to come together, and that's what Faith & Blue Weekend uniquely offers every local community in this country.

## **Donelan**

*08:57*

Thank you so much for that. And what I want to do is, at this point, give an idea to our listeners as to the sort of different types of events that are held as National Faith & Blue events, because they really run the gamut, again, tailored to whatever your community needs in terms of what relationships you have with your community, what you're trying to work on, whether or not it was a singular event that has caused a need for discussion, whether it's being proactive in improving relations so we don't arrive at that moment.

So, let's just go through a couple of the different types of events, because that's one of the things that stood out to the COPS Office is the flexibility of the event. So, for instance, you had several sporting events where young people or community members competed against officers, or the teams were mixed with officers and youth. There were faith-based events where officers were invited to worship with communities, vigils for crime victims that included both police and community grieving together—I think the keyword is together. In one community, police and youth got together to watch the movie *Selma* followed by a discussion about race relations between police and that community. A men's breakfast where the police department and African American men from the community ate together and had needed conversations. Events that centered around Jewish, Muslim, and Seventh Day Adventist houses of worship. There were health fairs conducted. Some of the departments got their recruiters involved and others even had You Ask, We Answer sessions, which is great. It's talking with, instead of talking to. A barn raising, police and community members collaborating on repairing houses for the elderly or the less fortunate. And then open houses, pulling back the veil and getting people inside the departments to sort of create that openness.

You know, I think that one of the things is you have police departments who are making changes to policies, but unless you're communicating that and really engaging with your community and telling them that we're changing this policy and here's why, and it's in hopes of improving the community and we're hoping that they can engage and get that buy in. So, let me go back to the 18,000 law enforcement agencies across the country, Reverend. How do you get the message about all of this to all of them?

## Hutchins

11:06

Well, it's an enormous amount of work that's required, to be very honest with you. We are working around the clock, constantly on travel, visiting with police chiefs and sheriffs' associations across the country. Again, we are fortunate to have the partnership of all of the major national law enforcement organizations from IACP and Major City Chiefs to the National Sheriffs' Association and Major County Sheriffs to the affinity groups in law enforcement, like HAPCOA and NOBLE, and the think tanks like the National Policing Institute, which used to be the National Police Foundation and PERF and the FOP and other police unions. So, it's really a widespread effort, but we also enjoy working with the state police chiefs and sheriffs' associations across the country from the Alaska Association of Chiefs of Police to the Florida Sheriffs Association and every one of the states in between.

So, during the process of organizing, we do webinars in each one of those states, mostly partnered together with the chiefs and sheriffs' associations in those states and those state associations invite their chiefs and sheriffs to a webinar to learn more about Faith & Blue Weekend. And once they learn and figure out and see all of the assets and resources that are available to them, frankly, we have very few law enforcement agencies that decline to participate in Faith & Blue. And so that's the process that we utilize to organize across the country.

## Donelan

12:35

Reverend, I know that there are people listening who are saying, you know, "That sounds great, but I don't even know where to start." So, can you talk about the toolkit? What is that?

## Hutchins

12:45

So, we have developed every single tool and resource that any agency in this country would need to be successful planning for National Faith & Blue Weekend and there is no cost. We don't sell things. We've given away and we will continue to give away thousands of T-shirts and banners. In addition to all of that, we make it turnkey and very convenient.

The toolkit that has been developed for National Faith & Blue Weekend, we developed it in partnership with all of our national law enforcement partners, and of course our partners at the COPS Office and it tracks perfectly with 21st century policing principles. In that toolkit is every tool and resource, again, that any agency can use to plan and execute multiple Faith & Blue Weekend activities across their jurisdiction. There's sample letters, there's sample talking points, there's sample telephone scripts. There are answers to frequently asked questions. And most importantly, in that toolkit, there are sample activities that fall into four different categories.

The first category is fostering dialogue and understanding. So, those are the kinds of events that allow the community and the law enforcement agency to have conversations around crime and violence or around distrust, around the need to build unity. So those are community conversations or vigils or essay contests. Those kinds of things.

The second category of sample activities in the tool kit are things that create connections, so that humanize one another, that calls folks to focus again on the things that unite us all together, the humanity, if you will, in one another. So those are things like picnics and barbecues or athletic events or movie nights. Those kinds of things.

The third category of sample events are cultivating partnerships and engagements. So, the focus of those events is on building collaboration between the law enforcement agency and the local leaders in that community. So those are community service projects, Habitat for Humanity builds, citizen academies, and blood drives. We've got a partnership with the American Red Cross. So, that's a third category of sample activities that are in the toolkit.

And finally, the fourth category is promoting peace and safety through arts and culture. So, music and arts are things that transcend our differences. So, those are things like music festivals and arts festivals and dance contests. But in that toolkit, there are more than 30 sample activities with a step-by-step guide for each one of them.

So, any law enforcement agency, any community organization in this country can simply go to [www.faithandblue.org](http://www.faithandblue.org), that's W-W-W-dot-F-A-I-T-H-A-N-D-B-L-U-E-dot-O-R-G, click on the Resources tab, download the planning toolkit. And all of the activities are clearly laid out with checklists and timelines. There's a step-by-step guide and all of them can be planned within a couple of weeks.

## **Donelan**

15:46

Wow. You know, what's so fantastic about that is the fact that you've provided the groundwork, right? You've done the heavy lifting for those who need it. And quite frankly, the reality of it is, you're running public safety for a community 24 hours, seven days a week. You have limited personnel, limited time. You have, oftentimes, got officers who are wearing four or five different hats, and to be able to access that information, those tools to get something started, I'm sure is a huge benefit for the law enforcement agencies and the houses of worship. Because, again, as you mentioned, 350,000 faith-based organizations in the United States—that's a lot of help out there.

18,000 law enforcement agencies, and you're providing them that groundwork to really, you know, put something into action. And Coffee with a Cop and National Night Out—they're fabulous. They're super valuable events. But I know that whatever help, whatever tools we can get to the law enforcement community and communities overall, they're hungry for it. And people are looking for something so that we can get to a place, as you discussed, where it's, when it's time to march, it's time to march, but when it's time to like, "We've got to do something," National Faith & Blue Weekend appears to me to offer that opportunity.

## **Hutchins**

*17:02*

Absolutely. In a lot of ways, Faith & Blue Weekend is like National Night Out and Coffee with a Cop and 21st century policing all together on steroids, because it allows for the local community to collaborate with law enforcement and actually do some things that help to move the needle forward on some of the most challenging and pressing issues in those local communities. And that's what Faith & Blue Weekend really provides an opportunity to do. And we have done the heavy lifting. It's really no excuse for any law enforcement agency not to participate in Faith & Blue Weekend thanks to the generosity of our sponsors, FirstNet built with AT&T and the Motorola Solutions Foundation, two key partners and vendors for law enforcement. All of the tools and resources have been provided.

We've done the heavy lifting and we want every law enforcement agency in this country to take advantage of this opportunity. And on a large scale, it really gives us a chance to focus the nation's attention away from some of the challenges and the tragedies that we've seen, not just with law enforcement officers and folks being killed that are unarmed, but really the attacks on our law enforcement professionals.

From 2020 to 2021, the number of law enforcement professionals that died in the line of duty doubled in a single year. All the while, crime and violence is escalating, officer attrition rates are challenging, the alarming number of law enforcement professionals that are leaving the profession. Many of them have taken their own lives. We have to change the narrative. We have to shift the discussion because no one is winning at this moment. There's a continuing escalation of tensions in a lot of communities. Again, officers are leaving the profession, and all of that, I believe, is a direct result of some of the tensions, the challenges, the misinformation, the false narratives that have been circulating for the past several years. And that's what Faith & Blue Weekend gives us an opportunity to do, to create a local, regional, and a national movement to really change some of those things.

## **Donelan**

*19:11*

Reverend, this all sounds really big because it is big and the possibilities are huge, and the impact is so great that we may have an individual officer who's listening, or an officer who is with a very small department. But if you think about that lone officer who knows that their agency isn't involved in something like this, or isn't aware of something like this, or that smaller police department, what do you say to them if they're interested in taking Faith & Blue to their community and their agency?

## **Hutchins**

*19:43*

I'm so glad that you asked that. Everybody just assumes that when something as massive as this is developed, that it's done to the benefit of large or major city or major county agencies alone. But that is simply not the case with Faith & Blue Weekend. We design all of the materials, the toolkit and everything else, with smaller and medium size agencies in mind.

So, last year, for 2021, 63 percent of all of the registered events were from smaller and medium agencies. I'm proud to tell you that more than 95 percent of our nation's major cities participate in Faith & Blue Weekend: New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Washington, D.C., Dallas, et cetera. All of them participate, but as well, very small communities. In fact, the smallest community to have participated in Faith & Blue Weekend was a city in West Virginia called Bradshaw, West Virginia. They have a population of just 212 people, but they were able to take the toolkit that can be found, again, on the website, [faithandblue.org](http://faithandblue.org), under the Resources tab. They were able to take that toolkit and bring Faith & Blue to their community.

In addition to that, I have a staff member that is assigned to every state in this country. So, if any agency hears this, wants to get involved, I encourage them to reach out to us via the website or by email at [info@faithandblue.org](mailto:info@faithandblue.org). Again, that's I-N-F-O-at-F-A-I-T-H-A-N-D-B-L-U-E-dot-O-R-G and a member of my team will be delighted to work with any law enforcement agency across this country to bring Faith & Blue to their community and we can show them just how to do that.

## **Donelan**

21:28

That's wonderful because, you're right, people automatically think about the larger police agencies, but of the 18,000 law enforcement agencies in the country, most of them are smaller. And though the impact is just as real, if something happens in say, Lubbock, Texas, a citizen in Cleveland, Ohio will be feeling that same event, right?

In Cleveland, they'll be looking at their police officers in much the same, and they're completely different organizations. You know, there's no real standardization across law enforcement. Each community, each agency has its own challenges, but when something impacts a community in any community, the rest of us feel it. So, it's just as important. It's critical that all law enforcement agencies know that this is a tool that they have at their disposal. I cannot thank you enough for going into the details and sharing your time with us about this. Because I think that, for those who haven't participated, you've given them the keys to the castle here. One more time, when is Faith & Blue Weekend?

## **Hutchins**

22:27

So, National Faith & Blue Weekend 2022 is Friday, October 7th, through Monday, October the 10th. We expect thousands of events across the country and I encourage every law enforcement agency and every law enforcement professional that hears this, don't just assume that your agency is participating.

Go to your leadership and make certain that you all get involved in Faith & Blue Weekend. And it's not just for the law enforcement agency, there are law enforcement organizations, there are chapters of NOBLE and offices of FOP and certain other organizations that are hosting events. So, it's really for any law enforcement entity and any faith-based organization or local community organization to come



together during the course of Faith & Blue Weekend. We need all hands on deck. And one of the real benefits of Faith & Blue Weekend is it garners a lot of media attention. It really helps to change the narrative and shift the discussion.

And here's the way I like to frame it, Jennifer, we need all hands on deck to change the narrative, to shift the discussion, to engage communities and law enforcement together, to decrease the violent crime and decrease the tensions and the mutual bias that we carry, and it won't happen without every law enforcement agency and every law enforcement professional. So, I would encourage everyone that listens to this to get involved and let's together be the change that we want to see.

## **Donelan**

23:53

Well, Reverend, I can't think of a better way to end this, but I am sorry to see you go, but I know that you have a lot of work ahead of you. And we just want to thank you so much for your time, your commitment, your creativity, your inspiration in developing Faith & Blue Weekend. And we can't wait to see what happens next.

## **Hutchins**

24:13

Thank you so much.

## **Donelan**

24:14

Thank you so much for joining us, Reverend Hutchins. And thank you for joining us here on *The Beat*.

## **Voiceover: *The Beat* Exit**

24:18

*The Beat* is brought to you by the United States Department of Justice's COPS Office. The COPS Office helps to keep our nation's communities safe by giving grants to law enforcement agencies, developing community policing publications, developing partnerships, and solving problems. If you have comments or suggestions, please email our Response Center at [askcopsrc@usdoj.gov](mailto:askcopsrc@usdoj.gov), or check out our social media on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/dojcops](http://www.facebook.com/dojcops)), on YouTube ([www.youtube.com/c/dojcopsffice](http://www.youtube.com/c/dojcopsffice)), or on Twitter @COPSOffice. Our website is [www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov).

## **Voiceover: Disclaimer**

25:17

The opinions contained herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. References to specific agencies, companies, products, or services should not be considered an endorsement by the authors or the U.S. Department of Justice, rather the references are illustrations to supplement discussion of the issues.