



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Sanders Jr.

Sanders' Community Clergy Breakfast Aims to Improve

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State Senator James Sanders Jr. (D-Rochdale Village, Far Rockaway) today held his monthly Community Clergy Breakfast at Church of God Christian Academy in Far Rockaway, where he hosted members of law enforcement to discuss how relations can be improved with the communities they police and particularly with faith-based leaders.

“We are here to discuss the issues of the day, which are - how are we policed and how do we interact with the police?” Sanders said. “I personally believe it is a two-way street. Both sides have to give each other respect. As a Marine Corps veteran, I understand what it is like to wear a uniform, and I also understand the mindset of wanting to get home at night. I also understand some parts of the community at times can be difficult, and downright dangerous. At the same time, the vast majority of people in any community want to live a decent, safe life.”

The guest speakers were Inspector Steven Griffith, NYPD Commanding Officer, Community Outreach Division, Police Officer Mohamed Amen of the NYPD Community Affairs Bureau Clergy Unit and Deputy Inspector Deputy Inspector Justin Lenz, Commanding Officer of the 101st Precinct in Far Rockaway.

“Most of the time we do a good job, but there are sometimes when we fail, and as a department it is at events like this one where we are able to engage in conversations and we’re able to learn, and we are able to do a better job,” Griffith said. “We have to do a better job. We are a department that is growing. We are a diverse city and when we come to these forums we get a little better at serving the community.”

“Some of the biggest partners and contacts we have are the clergy, and our religious leaders, because when you first move to a new city, the first place you go to is your church, because that’s where you feel most comfortable ” Griffith added. “So for us, if we want to get our message out, those are the partnerships we are looking to build. The clergy keep it real with us, but they are also able to help us build that bridge.”

Griffith and Amen spoke about the NYPD’s Clergy Unit, which creates and builds relationships with the 8,000 – 9,000 faith-based organizations of all across the city, working directly with 250 clergy liaison members representing all religious denominations. Amen said they are always in contact with them during good times

and bad to find out what their specific needs are, and also to comfort them and deescalate any unrest following hate crimes that are religiously motivated.

At the 101st Precinct in Far Rockaway, Lenz said that often times the commanding officer and the community affairs officers are the most well known members of law enforcement among community leaders.

“The precinct I command has 250 people assigned to it and I think it’s a shame when you only know three,” Lentz said. “So our goal is to expand community policing where the officers are assigned by neighborhood and getting those officers out to meet as many people as possible.”

Senator Sanders' Community Clergy Breakfasts are held monthly with a new topic each time, but always aimed at educating clergy and giving them the tools and information they need to help themselves and their congregations.