

Community Commitment:

Like many in our community, I am deeply troubled and saddened by the actions of Minneapolis police officers that resulted in the unnecessary death of a citizen. As Mayor I have witnessed many of our city police officers take their oath of office as each pledges to protect and support the citizens they serve. I wondered how they viewed the events of the last few weeks,

I was concerned the events of the last two weeks had affected our small police department and wanted to confirm their commitment so I spent some time this week with Police Chief Mike Wilkie and Patrol Commander Chris Winkle talking about the national events and our own policies and practices. Anyone seeing a St. Marys police vehicle is aware of a part of the Department's mission is to insure the "safety and security of our community with **honor, integrity, respect and courage**. Those four words are painted on our St. Marys patrol cars as a daily reminder of the standards by which all officers go about their daily duties.

Chief Wilkie is an experienced 34 year law enforcement professional and an outspoken advocate of community policing. To him that principle means tolerance and patience. It means no racial profiling, no discrimination, sensitivity to cultural differences, focus on crisis intervention and a commitment to ethical behavior. He and his force are out in the community listening and engaging in conversation and community events every day.

The Chief personally opposes chokehold and reminds us that it is specifically forbidden as is failing to warn before firing a weapon. The primary tactic of our police force is de-escalation. The Chief indicated he is in the final phases of completing Risk Management Certifications for the city that will demonstrate the force's training and professionalism in approved police tactics. Commander Winkle told me the force prides itself on being ahead of the curve in implementing many of the standards national leaders and organizations are just now proposing. He summed it up by saying that the men and women in blue take pride in taking care of the community and knowing the community takes pride in knowing we will do what's right. As they did last week, our police force will always collaborate with law enforcement officers countywide in protecting peaceful demonstrators and even joining those march protests.

I question one Mayor who recently said "the Minneapolis situation could never happen here". Anything can happen anywhere, but I am confident that our police department has the policies, the compassion, the training and the commitment to achieve their mission of "Honor, Integrity, Respect and Courage" without implementing questionable brute force tactics.

If it reads like I'm defending our men and women in blue, I am. In no way does that mean that I am defending those in law enforcement who fail to uphold their pledge to protect and serve. It does not mean that I turn a blind eye to racial

injustice or police brutality. It means that I believe the citizens of St. Marys are well served by the men and women who have taken the oath to protect and serve.

None of this changes what happened in Minneapolis. None of this changes the validity of the protest messages. None of this lessens the pain that has rocked our nation for the last two weeks. Even if we feel comfortable in our small city, we all know the issues and challenges are serious. As elected officials, we must support those who do the right thing while still providing leadership to fight intolerance and racial injustice. We must support peaceful protests and voices of reason. In the midst of a global pandemic and the reality of a fragile global economy, thinking beyond our city limits is essential if we are all to prosper and thrive.