

2 jobs, 1 mission for policeman/pastor

Staff Writer

VINELAND -- To the casual observer, Baron McCoy seems to have two opposing jobs.

McCoy doesn't think so.

He is a police officer for 40 hours a week. And when he's not working in the Traffic Safety Unit, he spends most of his time as pastor of the Word of Life Christian Worship Center.

"It's the same job," said McCoy, 40. "As a police officer I have to display honesty, character and integrity. I do the same in my ministry."

His law enforcement career brings him into contact with criminals and people with serious character flaws, as well as the average citizen who gets stopped for a simple traffic violation.

"The law justifies my actions as a police officer," he said. "I have sworn to uphold the law, and that means I have to use force if necessary. But the law is for the lawless. A just man does not violate the law," he said. "At the same time, I'm not here to condemn anyone, but I must uphold the law."

As a clergyman, McCoy can't divulge information about a crime that someone confesses to him in confidence, but he does not anticipate that happening.

"It has never happened before, and I don't think it will ever happen, because I always tell people that I'm a police officer before starting any counseling session or confidential conversation," McCoy said. "Of course, I would advise anyone who shared information about a crime to go to the nearest police department."

There is an exception in his role as a police officer.

"If there was a spontaneous utterance about a crime, I'd lock them up," he said.

With such a busy schedule, McCoy's family life revolves around the nondenominational Christian church at Sixth Street and Park Avenue. He shares pastoral duties with his wife, Priscilla, 39. Together, they conduct Sunday services beginning at 11 a.m. along with planning and participating in numerous other church activities.

There are about 150 members, and average Sunday attendance is around 90. The McCoy's take no salary from the church, which they acquired four years ago for \$150,000. An additional \$80,000 was spent to refurbish the building, including a new roof and windows.

"We're doing very well. I believe our debt is down to about \$120,000," the pastor said.

McCoy completed biblical training at Rhema Bible Institute and Living Faith Christian Center. He was an associate pastor for eight years before becoming a pastor five years ago.

The late Bishop King Burnett was his mentor.

"Bishop Burnett held a full-time job, just as I do," McCoy said. "He was an honest, hard worker who guided me in my faith and my studies."

Terrence J. Hickman became acquainted with McCoy more than a year ago when a friend invited him to a play at the church.



For 40 hours a week, Baron McCoy works as an officer in the Vineland Police Department's Traffic Safety Unit.



In his off-hours, Baron McCoy is a pastor at the Word of Life Christian Worship Center in Vineland.

"I saw him outside, and we immediately became engaged in conversation," Hickman said. "I didn't know he was the pastor until someone else addressed him.

"I learned that he was a police officer the next time I came to the church."

Hickman soon became an active member and still wonders how McCoy finds the time for two jobs.

"He's very easygoing with a great sense of humor," Hickman said. "We're always calling him for one thing or another, and he's always there for us. There is so much demand on his time, but he makes it look easy."

Police Chief Timothy Codispoti has high praise for McCoy.

"Baron is an excellent police officer," the chief said. "I have found him to be diligent, fair and conscientious in all his work."

Originally from Pleasantville, McCoy came to Vineland when he joined the police force 18 years ago. Although he is a busy person, McCoy knows what he wants to do in the future.

"Building the ministry and changing lives for the better are my goals," he said.

Originally published March 14, 2007

Print this article E-mail this to a friend Subscribe Now