



COURTESY OF U.S. MARSHALS SERVICE

The Rev. Jay Matthews (center) let his Cleveland church be converted to a booking station and courtroom for fugitives to surrender.

Peter Elliott, the U.S. marshal for the Northern District of Ohio, was working out on his office's exercise machine a couple years ago when he came up with the idea for Fugitive Safe Surrender. Instead of hunting fugitives down, law enforcement officials obviously prefer to have suspects turn themselves in—it's safer, easier, and less expensive. But fugitives don't turn themselves in very often. They don't trust the police. And they expect to be locked up while they await adjudication, even for minor crimes.

OK, fugitives don't trust cops, Elliott thought as he exercised, but whom do they trust? An answer came to him: the clergy.

So with the help of consultant Doug Weiner, Elliott enlisted C. Jay Matthews, the senior pastor at Mount Sinai Baptist Church in Cleveland. Their plan involved moving every component of the judicial system—police, prosecutors, public defenders, and

judges—into Matthews's church for a few days. Matthews would encourage people with outstanding warrants for minor crimes to turn themselves in at the church, get their cases resolved, and get their punishment delivered, on the spot. "This is a law enforcement program instead of a faith-based program," Elliott said. "This is about trust. Whom do I trust? Whom does the individual trust? The clergy. The minister. Everything revolves around that."

Matthews put out the word that fugitives could surrender at the church. From August 3 to 6, 2005, 842 people turned themselves in; 324 of them were wanted for felony crimes. Police took violent-crime suspects into custody; those charged with nonviolent crimes were processed or released on bond. By contrast, a traditional fugitive sweep over the next three days nabbed just 65 people.

During the second Fugitive Safe Surrender program, held at a Phoenix

church in November 2006, more than 1,300 fugitives turned themselves in. The U.S. Marshals Service plans to conduct similar programs at other churches in the coming years. Congress has put its stamp of approval on the program, authorizing it in law and including about \$1.4 million in this year's unpassed appropriations bill for nationwide expansion.

Matthews, the minister at Mount Sinai, said that his involvement was not driven by a desire to proselytize, but by a wish to help his community. "We don't believe we have to make people believe in our God to serve them," he said. "We offered our care, we offered our facilities, we offered our compassion." Matthews said the fugitives who turned themselves in were looking for a chance to get right with the law, not for a religious experience. "Although, if a person came in and they were adjudicated and let go," he joked, "I think they probably were thanking God." —B.F.