

Guest Column to The News-Star
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From Mayor Jamie Mayo

We have a Shared Responsibility to Face the Ugly Elephants in the Room

For the past several weeks it has felt like we were watching a very bad movie. Almost every day we pick up our phone, watch or read the news and learn about another senseless killing. We no longer live in a time where we can simply shake our head in disgust of the violence seen in the Middle East, Europe or a third world country. That bad movie or reality series we have been watching is taking place in our very own back yard. In addition to deadly acts of violence seen here in Monroe, West Monroe and other parts of northeast Louisiana, it includes mass shootings (Orlando, San Bernardino, etc.), police shooting civilians (Baton Rouge, Minnesota, etc.), mothers killing their own children (Houston and Memphis), and deadly attacks on law enforcement (Dallas, Baton Rouge, etc.).

If we are going to collectively slow down and stop this violent trend, we must face reality and address some big ugly elephants in the room. America has some problems that we must admit to and address. This country has a problem with racism, mental health awareness, respect for law enforcement, and overall community involvement. We will always have issues as a city, parish, state and country if we continue to ignore these issues. I don't know it all and I don't have all of the answers. But, I know there are several things we need to do as government leaders, law enforcement, faith-based leaders, educators, mental health facilitators and citizens. For the sake of time, I will just share 10 thoughts.

1. We must admit that racism is very prevalent in America.
2. We must have honest discussions and take a unified approach to end racist and bigoted practices in all aspects of life.
3. Since we can agree that "All Lives Matter" and "Blue Lives Matter," we should not be offended when you hear someone say "Black Lives Matter". The real purpose of that phrase and movement is to focus on the very real issues surrounding high murder and incarceration rates and incidents of police brutality involving black people.

4. We need to stop ignoring the mental health issues that exist within our family.
5. We need to find ways to increase awareness and accessibility to mental health services.
6. We need to repair the damaged relationship that exists between law enforcement and the community.
7. We need to increase sensitivity and diversity training for law enforcement; and, we need more people to become involved in Citizens Police Academy training. Things change when you gain a better/different perspective of someone.
8. We need to return to the “it takes a village to raise a child” concept.
9. We need more programs for youth and young adults. We need faith-based, education, and community leaders to help because government can’t do it all.
10. We need God and each other. I know that we may have different perspectives on faith and religion, but, I believe society will improve if we all live out the faithful concept of “I am my brothers’ keeper!”

Although I can’t list you all by name, I want to commend everyone who is truly trying to make a difference to address these issues. We have good men and women working hard for short and long-term solutions to these societal ills. What I ask of each person reading this article is that you be a part of the solution. Some will play big roles, while others will just do their small part. Either way is fine. If we all just do our part, we can truly make a difference. Let’s have real, meaningful discussions about racism, mental health, respect for law enforcement and community involvement. Then let’s find solutions by working together. We can tear down the walls that divide us and build bridges that lead to a much better America, starting right here in Monroe and northeast Louisiana!