

Operators Use Ministry Skills to Help Co-workers

By CHRISTINA ESPARZA

(May 28, 2002) When bus operators at Central City Division 1 have personal or professional problems and are in need of guidance, or even just a listening ear, two of their fellow operators are ready for their call.

In fact, it's actually their job.

Bus Operators Earl Franklin and Richard Powell are both ordained ministers and often work as counselors to their fellow employees.

"Both operators are leaders in the division," said Central City Transportation Manager Sonja Owens. "Whenever problems arise with the other operators, they act as my liaisons. Sometimes, operators are intimidated by management and they need someone to lean on. They defuse a lot of negative things in the division."

Franklin decided to become a minister about 14 years ago. After being an Army Reservist and earning the Army Achievement Award five times and the coveted Meritorious Service Medal, he was contemplating becoming a police officer.

"I had a decision to make," Franklin said. "Do I want to take lives, or do I want to save lives? So, I chose religion over becoming a police officer."

Performs wedding ceremonies

While working as a part-time minister at Christ Church in Los Angeles, he visits hospitals, performs wedding ceremonies and delivers the eulogies at funerals.

In fact, Franklin recently eulogized a woman who made a special request for him after he had spoken at her husband's funeral.

"That made me feel good," he said.

Powell has been a pastor at Blessed Assurance Christian Church for four years now, but he found faith when he was much younger.

At 19 years old, Powell found himself hanging out with a gang and going down a dangerous path. But, one day a pretty girl asked him to attend church with her.

"I went there basically to see her," Powell said with a laugh. "But, soon, I started to go to listen."

Organizes youth programs

Now, Powell, who currently runs the church out of his home while looking for another building, organizes marriage retreats and youth summer programs, which deal with drug and promiscuity issues.

Central City Transportation Manager **Sonja Owens**, center, says Bus Operators **Earl Franklin**, left, and **Richard Powell** use their skills as ordained ministers to help keep the lines of communication open between operators and management.



"I take enjoyment in knowing I could help people with personal problems," Powell said. "It's a better way to look at life."

The two operators convey to their co-workers that they are there to help, and often get taken up on their offer. Both say co-workers often call them at home when they have problems — regardless of denomination.

"Whatever religion you're in, you have to answer to a higher being," Powell said. "You've got to have faith. Without faith, you won't have answers or comfort."

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