

As Baltimore City marks 300 murders, prayers for peace continue

On the same day Bishop Denis J. Madden led an evening prayer walk for peace through the streets surrounding St. Veronica in Cherry Hill Nov. 2, Baltimore City achieved the dubious distinction of reaching 300 murders so far this year.

It was the third straight year the city has logged 300 murders or more, arriving on the same day the Catholic Church commemorated the feast of All Souls.

The irony was not lost on the bishop, who during his prayer vigil had stopped at three sites where people had been killed.

"Every night on T.V., you'll see reports of one or two shootings in and around Baltimore," said Bishop Madden, urban vicar. "It dulls the mind so that there's nothing new or shocking about it."

All must guard against the notion that killings are somehow to be expected or tolerated in the city, he said.

"People should not have to live that way," Bishop Madden insisted. "It's not normal that people shoot each other."

Among the nearly 70 people who participated in the peace walk was a 9-year-old girl who wore a large medical boot on her foot, the aftermath of a gunshot wound she sustained in September when a gunman inadvertently hit her instead of his intended target.

"Her attitude is wonderful," Bishop Madden said. "She was smiling, and she came back to the church with us, even though it was a bit of a walk from her house. She was an innocent child who got caught in the crossfire."

Bishop Madden gave a ringing endorsement of a 72-hour "cease fire" that has been

declared in the city for Nov. 3-5. Calling the second-of-its-kind initiative “wonderful,” the bishop said it is intended to draw down violence.

Noting that there are many causes of violence, Bishop Madden highlighted the ready availability of guns as one of the most concerning. He suggested that society must explore ways of curbing the proliferation of guns.

“In the past, people could yell and scream and throw some punches at each other,” he said. “But these days, if they don’t have a gun, they go to their car or house to retrieve it and they come back and they settle scores that way.”

It’s important for the Catholic Church to be present in areas touched by violence to show love and solidarity, Bishop Madden said.

“Walking through the streets and being able to read Scripture, say prayers, sing hymns and carry a cross is important,” he said. “There’s something good about that. You are professing your faith and trying to support the people in the area and let them know they are not alone and they are not forgotten.”

Bishop Madden noted that the monthly prayer walks have seen an increase in participation. The previous prayer walk was Sept. 27, from St. Francis Xavier Church in the Oliver section of East Baltimore. Approximately 150 people joined the bishop and Josephite Father Xavier Edet, pastor of St. Francis Xavier. The historic church is the first black Catholic parish in the United States.

The group that evening included Capuchin Franciscan Father Paul Zaborowski, pastor of St. Ambrose in Park Heights; students from Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in East Baltimore; and several members of Nativity Missions, an outreach of the Church of the Nativity in Timonium. Stops included the Oliver Senior Housing Plaza, on what was part of the former St. Joseph Hospital; and the Dawson Safe Haven Center, on the corner of Eden and Preston Streets.

The Safe Haven Center commemorates the 2002 firebombing murder of five members of the Dawson family, in retaliation for their having reported drug dealing outside their home to police.

The next prayer walk for peace will be held outside St. Wenceslaus in East Baltimore

Nov. 29, beginning with a light meal at 5:30 p.m.

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