

Bishop Madden meets with city police commissioner

Auxiliary Bishop Denis J. Madden told Baltimore City Police Commissioner Frederick H. Bealefeld III that the Archdiocese of Baltimore will continue to take a stand against violence in the streets.

The commissioner met with numerous religious leaders from across the city April 23 to inform them about his plans for the city.

"It was a very, very good meeting," Bishop Madden said.

The city is plagued with drug and violence problems. There were 234 reported homicides in the city during 2008. In the meeting, Commissioner Bealefeld said an estimated 30,000 guns are on the streets and only 3,000 are seized a year.

A constant worry about the foothold of gangs like MS-13 and the Bloods hovers over the city, according to Bishop Madden.

According to the bishop, the police will beef up training for its staff members and increase foot patrols.

"Not only is it a good deterrent, but it allows the community and the policemen to get to know each other," Bishop Madden said.

Bishop Madden added that Commissioner Bealefeld told the religious leaders that city residents "will have no better friend than the police."

Protection, he told them, was the police's top priority.

The department operates about 18 police athletic centers that serve 3,000 children throughout the city. The police hope for more facilities soon.

Religious leaders said more youth and employment programs must be available and offered enthusiastic support for the police department, according to Bishop Madden.

Those church leaders also said Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien could be a powerful voice in the movement to reclaim the streets.

Bishop Madden, who walked in troubled areas with city Catholic churches during prayer vigils in the summer of 2008, told Commissioner Bealefeld "we have to take a stand where there is violence. We tolerate certain areas that we give up on."

During an interview with The Catholic Review, Bishop Madden added: "We were all in total agreement that we would take a united stand to stop the violence. It's no longer needed here."

Bishop Madden said city residents must feel empowered about their place in the community.

"We can," Bishop Madden said, "make a difference."