

City parishioners to have smoke alarms installed

As a chaplain for the Baltimore City Fire Department, Father Ross M. Syracuse, O.F.M. Conv., has seen firsthand the deadly results of fires in city homes.

So, he was encouraged when St. Casimir, Canton, where he serves as pastor, was chosen to participate in a pilot program offering churchgoers free smoke detectors, professional installation and fire-safety education.

A representative from the Baltimore nonprofit fire-safety organization PIRE will be in the church vestibule before and after Mass Oct. 27-28 encouraging people to take advantage of the cost-free service.

PIRE teamed up with the urban vicariate of the Archdiocese of Baltimore to urge parishioners of four other city Catholic churches to allow them to install the free smoke alarms in their homes and help them develop a fire-safety plan, said Bishop Denis J. Madden, urban vicar.

Parishioners of St. Gregory the Great, Baltimore, will have an opportunity to schedule appointments with PIRE before and after Mass Oct. 21.

The group plans to visit St. Athanasius, Curtis Bay, New All Saints, Liberty Heights and St. Bernardine, Baltimore, for the same purpose sometime in the coming weeks, once a date can be agreed on, representatives from those parishes said.

In the past city and nonprofit groups have distributed free smoke detectors to encourage residents to install them in their homes, but in many circumstances those devices were never set up or were improperly mounted, Father Syracuse said.

“In this case, someone with experience will go out to the home, set it up strategically and properly,” he said. “It will ensure the smoke alarm will have fresh batteries and it comes out of the box and goes on the walls, where they can help save lives.”

The representatives plan to revisit these homes nine months after the installation to make sure the devices continue to work properly.

“This is a great partnership between this group, the urban vicariate and the parishes,” said Monsignor Damien Nalepa, pastor of St. Gregory the Great. “The installation and education is a positive component, especially for our parishioners with modest means. Even the parishioners who live outside of the city limits can take advantage of it.”