

City pastors want to help clear the streets of guns

Monsignor Damien Nalepa and Father Peter Lyons are never giving up on Baltimore City and they want everyone else to have that faith as well.

The two urban pastors are once again leading gun buybacks at their respective parishes - St. Gregory the Great and St. Wenceslaus - with the help of The Catholic Review, which is co-sponsoring the event Dec. 10.

The parishes will purchase automatic guns, assault rifles and semi-automatic guns for \$100 and \$50 for all workable guns from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. All collected guns will be given to the police.

Monsignor Nalepa said that people have been hurt on purpose and by accident through gun activity.

"The violence hasn't subsided," admitted Monsignor Nalepa. "We've had several instances close to the church."

Father Lyons, a Third Order Regular Franciscan, said his order is committed to non-violence wherever it has a presence. He said that St. Francis was popular when he was alive, but had a simple rule: you have to leave your weapons behind to follow me.

"We live in a violent part of a violent city," Father Lyons said. "We just think it's healthier for all concerned to get these guns off the streets."

Father Lyons said the neighborhood around St. Wenceslaus is undergoing "major urban development," and hope is emerging.

Above all, he wants people to know that everyone in the city is welcome Dec. 10.

"This gun buyback is not limited to our immediate neighborhood," he said.

In West Baltimore, Monsignor Nalepa said that the challenges of drugs and violence

can be overwhelming. The economy has led to high unemployment in the area and some resort to violence out of desperation.

“The sad part is it’s too much part of the daily routine,” said the pastor of St. Gregory the Great since 1981. “The shock of losing human life through violence has become too diminished. People are becoming so accustomed to it. It’s all about the sanctity of human life. No matter what, life is worth living.”

City parishes have led peace vigils and marches to show that the Catholic Church is in solidarity with surrounding communities.

Despite the struggles, Monsignor Nalepa said there is reason to believe in Baltimore.

“It’s really the dedication and faith of the people, which feeds my personal faith,” he said.

Locations

St. Gregory the Great - 1542 N. Gilmor St., Baltimore, MD 21217

St. Wenceslaus - 2111 Ashland Ave., Baltimore, MD 21205