

# St. Bernardine enlists help of prayer warriors

Parishioners of St. Bernardine, Baltimore, are looking for 300 good warriors to deal with the city's highest murder rate in eight years. Prayer warriors, that is.

When 2007 ended, the city recorded 282 murders, the highest figure since 1999, and members of the West Baltimore church decided they wanted to reach out to families of the victims, the accused and their loved ones in a prayerful way.

"We want to enlist at least 300 people from the parish to help us pray for the people in our city who are in real need of a prayer," said George Patterson, president of the St. Bernardine Parish Council. "We have about 150 (prayer warriors) so far. I know we can get all 300."

Father Edward M. Miller, pastor of St. Bernardine, ran notices in the parish bulletin during the month of January to recruit more parishioners.

Each prayer warrior will send a card to the families of victims, accused murders and their loved ones - when contact information is available - to let them know someone is out there praying for them, said Mr. Patterson, a longtime parishioner.

"In that card we're also going to ask them if there is anything we can do for them," the Northwest Baltimore resident said. "Sometimes, people need someone to listen to the things that are giving them pain."

While they are praying for the citizens most affected by the murders, the St. Bernardine parishioners will also ask God to rid the city of its murder rate.

"This has to stop," Mr. Patterson said. "We need to work with the children of this city and pray they learn better ways of dealing with their anger, frustration and pain."

The prayer warrior program is getting kudos from Bishop Denis J. Madden, urban vicar.

“It reminds me of the Amish community after the school house killing in Pennsylvania a few years ago and how they reached out to the wife of the man who did the shooting,” Bishop Madden said. “That is the Gospel way of dealing with violence. Forgiveness and love for all.”