

Summer crime, fueled by guns

It's summer in the city, and if past summers - and the past couple of weeks - are any indication, the season that for many means relaxing by the pool and vacationing down the ocean will not be like that for some of our brothers and sisters. Instead, June, July and August will be marred by heated tempers and violence, death and sadness.

Summer in East Baltimore brings with it not just the general mayhem, but especially gun crime, says Third Order Regular Franciscan Father Peter Lyons, pastor of St. Wenceslaus Parish on Ashland Avenue. "On weekends especially, when the weather is warm, the crowds gather. One thing leads to another," he says, and violence, often fueled by guns, breaks out. "When children are out of school, it adds to the volatile mix."

On Gilmor Street on the city's west side, Monsignor Damien Nalepa knows the summer really brings out the guns and violence. He recalled the recent afternoon shootings of six people, one fatally, just off Edmondson Avenue.

"In the summertime, when people are out more, if the guns are in people's hands, they'll use them," Monsignor Nalepa said.

The Catholic Review is sponsoring another Gun Turn-In program with St. Gregory the Great and St. Wenceslaus parishes, in an effort to get guns off the streets and stem the tide of violence in the city. For each workable automatic or semi-automatic gun or assault rifle, those who surrender a weapon receive a cash reward of \$100; for any other workable gun, the reward is \$50. This will be the fifth time The Catholic Review has been involved in this project; five other drives were conducted at St. Gregory from 2007 to '09, with another sponsor's assistance.

The next gun turn-in day will be July 16, from 10 a.m.-2 p.m., at both parish sites.

"We'll get some rifles and other guns that were found in the basement," Monsignor Nalepa admits. These are not guns coming out of the hands of criminals, but they won't be available to be accidentally used by children living in homes or visiting grandparents, or taken in home invasions. He also expects that, as in past

collections, “We’ll get some of the handguns and revolvers. These are the ones we need to get off the street.”

Father Lyons agrees. All the guns are turned over to Baltimore City police officers who log the weapons and take them for eventual destruction. He reports hearing officers say, “Any time we get a gun off the street, it’s a step in the right direction.”

You can help make possible those steps in the right direction. Support for the campaign has come recently from St. Wenceslaus’ own Peace Sunday collection during Lent, and from Church of the Nativity in Timonium, which sent the proceeds from its poor box after hearing about the program at Peace in the City meetings. However, we need more funds to continue this vital program. Your donation can make a difference. Just donate \$50 – give up a Starbucks coffee twice a week for the summer (or once a week for the rest of the year) – and you can take a gun off the street. The Catholic Review keeps no portion; all donations of any amount will be used for gun turn-in rewards. Send donations to Gun Turn-In, The Catholic Review, P.O. Box 777, Baltimore, MD 21203. To donate online and/or learn more, visit catholicreview.org/guns.

Father Lyons acknowledges that the 282 guns taken off the street in the parishes’ combined efforts in the past four years are only a small component of a much larger social problem, one that he and Monsignor Nalepa deal with every day.

“People say it’s only a small drop in the bucket. But it’s *our* drop in the bucket. It’s something we can do,” he said. And it’s something you can do, too. Please help.

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