

Two city parishes to host gun turn-in-days

Coming off the success of more than 50 guns turned in at a West Baltimore church in September, but concerned that gun violence in the city remains high, St. Gregory the Great Catholic Church will sponsor its eighth “Gun Turn-In Day” Dec. 5, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the church at 1542 N. Gilmor St. The program will expand to the east side of the city, with the first-ever weapon collection at St. Wenceslaus Church, 2111 Ashland Ave. at the same day and time.

In the seven previous campaigns, more than 160 guns have been turned in at St. Gregory. The process is anonymous, with no questions asked. Parish staff members and volunteers log the type of gun, and verify that it is unloaded and safe. At the close of the event, the guns are turned over to local law enforcement.

On the last gun turn-in day, 21 guns were surrendered the day of the event, but residents continued to call the parish in the following week. Another 34 guns were brought in over the course of the next 10 days, according to Monsignor Damien G. Nalepa, pastor of St. Gregory.

The program offers a \$100 reward for each workable automatic or semi-automatic handgun or assault rifle, and a \$50 reward for any other workable gun turned in. Some of the weapons surrendered in September included rifles, shotguns and assorted handguns.

“Police officers who helped with the gun turn-over said that some of the handguns are especially dangerous because they can be easily hidden and used to threaten or harm,” said Monsignor Nalepa, the driving force behind the program. “We appeal to all the citizens of our city to help stop the violence and turn in guns.”

The campaign is co-sponsored by The Catholic Review newspaper, which provided a start-up grant for the program and is challenging its readers and all members of the community to contribute to a fund so that the gun buy-back program can be held more regularly. An additional challenge grant has been made available by the

Archdiocese of Baltimore's Archbishop's Annual Appeal that would match dollar-for-dollar any donation made to the fund until the match reaches \$6,000. Christopher Gunty, associate publisher/editor of The Catholic Review, projects that \$15,000 will be needed to sustain four gun collections per year at the two locations.

Members of the community who wish more information about the program may contact Monsignor Nalepa at St. Gregory, at 410-523-0061 or Third Order Regular Franciscan Father Peter Lyons, pastor of St. Wenceslaus, at 410-675-7304.

Tax-deductible contributions can be sent to: The Cathedral Foundation Inc., Attn.: Catholic Review Gun Buy-Back, P.O. Box 777, Baltimore, MD 21203.

Information is also available at www.CatholicReview.org/guns, and donations may be made online at that site.