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A white man wearing a clerical collared shirt speaks into a microphone as men stand behind h

Fr. Mike Murphy, a Southwest Baltimore native and pastor of St. Joseph Monastery Parish in the city's Irvington neighborhood, thanks everyone for supporting an Aug.5, 2023, gun buyback and resource event. The priest was the brain trust behind the community initiative, which was held at the Edmondson Village Shopping Center in West Baltimore. (OSV News Photo/Kevin J. Parks, Catholic Review)

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Fr. Michael Murphy, pastor of St. Joseph's Monastery in Baltimore's Irvington neighborhood, is not sure how much of a dent an Aug. 5 gun buyback effort will make in the deadly violence that plagues cities such as Baltimore.

But he applauded the Archdiocese of Baltimore and the Baltimore City Police Department for coordinating the mission to give residents of West Baltimore hope.

The archdiocese raised more than $50,000 to finance the buyback event. Police officers exchanged cash and gift cards for weapons retrieved from the trunks of vehicles that formed a continuous, long line for several hours, wrapped around a local shopping center.

According to an archdiocesan spokesperson, the buyback secured 362 firearms, including 158 handguns and 17 semiautomatic weapons and other types. Police paid $200 for handguns, rifles and shotguns, $300 for assault weapons. Each of the weapons will be destroyed.

Before the buyback event, the Baltimore Police Department had reported recovering more than 1,400 illegal firearms from the streets of Baltimore.

"We are trying to work for peace and give people some hope that somebody is trying to do something for them," said Murphy, who organized the event. "Our gun violence problem can be depressing, because so much of it is outside of our control. This was a very positive day."

The buyback effort was joined by a resource fair that attracted more than a dozen participants, including Moms Demand Action, St. Vincent de Paul, Ascension St. Agnes, Black Lives Matter Interfaith Coalition, Baltimore City's homicide survivor advocates, a prayer booth with interfaith leaders offering spiritual guidance and Franciscan Center, which gave away 500 meals.

Motorists were lining up more than two hours before the event's scheduled 10 a.m. start. Police started to collect firearms shortly before 9:30 a.m.

By 1 p.m., the allotted buyback funds had been exhausted. People continued to give up their firearms for free.

"We didn't set a specific goal and prayed we would be able to buy back as much as our funding could take us, and that happened," Murphy told the Catholic Review, Baltimore's archdiocesan news outlet. "This is the beginning of building a better platform for peace. We can be a better city."

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Baltimore City Police Major Dwayne Swinton, who leads the department's special events section, noted that most of those turning in firearms were "middle aged or older," with few young people engaging in the buyback effort. Still, he said the gun buyback was an unequivocal success.

"I think this was a very good step," said Swinton, who compared the event to a buyback last year at Baltimore's First & Franklin Presbyterian Church. That effort yielded barely a dozen firearms.

"The biggest difference (we made today) is we collected weapons that won't wind up on the street," Swinton added. "Weapons get stolen during burglaries. We processed three stolen weapons (Saturday) morning. People turned them over for nothing today. This (event) was well-publicized. It was phenomenal."

A 49-year-old man who identified himself as "Sincere" said it did not matter that he received no compensation for the shotgun he parted with. "Sincere" said he suffered life-threatening wounds as a carjacking victim in Baltimore's Cherry Hill neighborhood in 2021. Before he relocated outside the city to Baltimore County, he needed the home protection the shotgun gave him.

"Now that I'm in a better place, I don't need a gun," he said. "I needed to get rid of it."

Maria Czajkowski, a resident of suburban Catonsville, Maryland, said she gave up a handgun for nothing. It had been stored in her garage for years.

"The money was an incentive to come out here," she told the Catholic Review. "But it's still worth it to get the gun off the street."

U.S. Rep. Kweisi Mfume, one of a group of local dignitaries who spoke at the event -- they included Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott, Baltimore City Council President Nick Mosby and Maryland state Sen. Jill Carter, who represents the city of Baltimore -- recalled participating in a peace and justice rally 50 years ago at the same shopping center.

"This is personal to me, making sure our communities can heal. Here we are again," Mfume said. "If it means we have come back for the next 50 years, we must. Our communities are too important to walk away from. We will not give up."